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ABSTRACT

School restructuring reforms have placed an increased emphasis on student outcomes as the primary qualitative measure of education systems. The Texas public school accountability system focuses attention on performance measured by standardized test scores (the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test), dropout rates, and attendance rates and highlights the relatively poor performance of minority and economically disadvantaged students. Case studies of Adams Elementary, Baldwin Middle, and Chapa High School in Texas provide the opportunity to explore the responses of effective campuses with highly concentrated populations of minority and economically disadvantaged students to new performance expectations and to identify the activities and practices they have adopted. Systemic data collection in the form of interviews, observation, and document analysis show several patterns across the sites, including: (1) provision of high levels of both academic and nonacademic support for students; (2) a strong sense of teacher-parent and teacher-teacher interdependence within the system; and (3) devotion of extraordinary time and effort to students by all staff members across the board. The three campuses show dramatic improvements in some outcomes and steady growth in others, contradicting assertions that high concentrations of minority and economically disadvantaged students excuse poor performance results. (Contains 1 graph, 4 tables, and 11 references.) (MKW)

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Case Studies of Successful Campuses: Responses to a High-Stakes State Accountability System

STATEWIDE TEXAS EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS STUDY

REPORT NO. 2 **MAY 1996**

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Case Studies of Successful Campuses: Responses to a High-Stakes State Accountability System

STATEWIDE TEXAS EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS STUDY

REPORT NO. 2 MAY 1996

CASE STUDIES OF SUCCESSFUL CAMPUSES: RESPONSES TO A HIGH-STAKES STATE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

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Project Staff

Department of Programs and Instruction
Felipe Alanis
Deputy Commissioner

Office of Policy Planning and Research
Criss Cloudt
Associate Commissioner

Project Director
Susan J. Barnes

Mindy Sitton

Graphics, Layout,and Design
Vicky A. Killgore

TEA Reviewers

Office of Policy Planning and Research
Maureen Moore Scheevel

Research and Evaluation Division
Maria D. Whitsett

Performance Reporting Division
Cherry Kugle

Case Studies of Successful Campuses: Responses to A High-Stakes State Accountability System

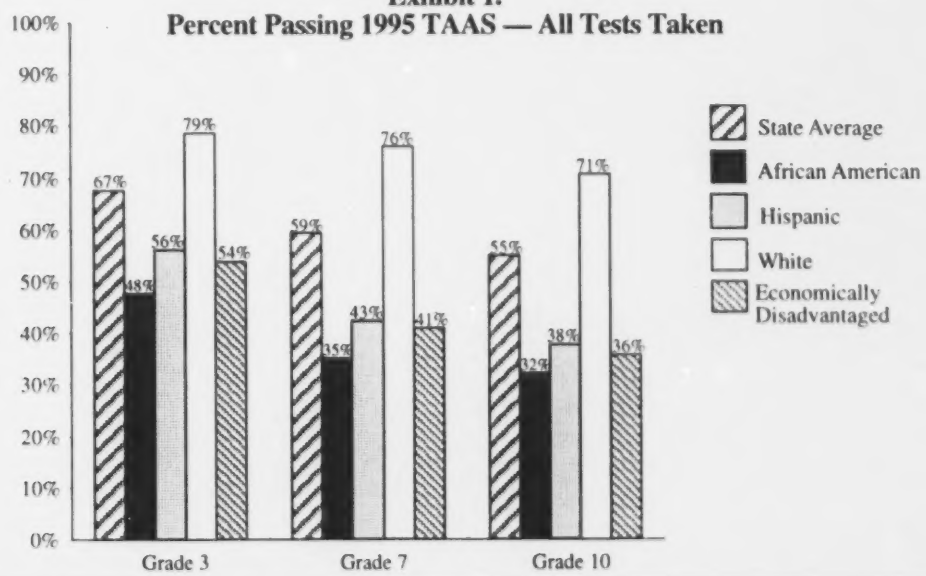
Perspectives

School restructuring reforms, especially their accompanying indicator systems, have placed an increased emphasis on student outcomes as the primary measure of quality of education systems (Slaganik, 1994). The Texas public school accountability system, established by statute in 1993, focuses attention on performance expectations for campuses and districts measured by standardized test scores, dropout rates and attendance rates (Texas Education Agency, 1994). For the first time the state accountability system clearly states what schools are expected to achieve in measurable terms and projects increasingly higher standards through the year 2000.

This accountability system has also highlighted the relatively poor performance of minority and economically disadvantaged students. As documented in the Academic Excellence Indicators System (AEIS) 1994-95 State Performance Report, the 1995 state passing rates on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) for all non-special education students in all grades tested were 78.4 percent in reading, 65.9 percent in mathematics, and 82.0 percent in writing. Approximately 61.0 percent of the students tested passed all TAAS tests taken that year in reading, mathematics, and writing.

When spring 1995 TAAS results are disaggregated for ethnic groups and economically disadvantaged students as shown in Exhibit 1, systematic differences in achievement among groups are very apparent. In no case did the statewide passing rates of these minority groups or economically disadvantaged students meet the state average. Given these statistics, schools with (1) high proportions of minority students and economically disadvantaged students, and (2) TAAS passing rates that meet or exceed the state averages are uncommon.

Exhibit 1.
Percent Passing 1995 TAAS — All Tests Taken



The release of campus performance ratings and district accreditation status under the Texas accountability system beginning in 1993 has generated considerable public attention accompanied by public pressure for improvements. Little is known about how successful campuses are responding programmatically to the implementation and rising standards of the state accountability system. Also rare is systematic study of the perspectives that teachers, administrators, students, and parents in these settings bring to this high stakes environment. The purpose of this study was to explore how effective campuses with highly concentrated populations of minority and economically disadvantaged students have responded to the new expectations for performance and to identify the activities and practices they have adapted and adopted.

Site Selection and Descriptions

Based upon performance in the state accountability system, a "purposeful" sample of three campus sites was selected in December 1994 using extreme case sampling. Selection criteria for campuses to be considered for participation included:

(1) high proportions of minority and economically disadvantaged student populations,

Demographically, 51.7 percent of students tested statewide during school year 1993-94 were minority, and 43.6 percent were economically disadvantaged. These percentages served as criteria for campus eligibility in this study.

(2) high performance on accountability system indicators,

The achievement criteria for this study were established using statewide data for the grades tested in spring 1994: grades 4, 8 and 10. The achievement criteria were defined as campus pass rates exceeding the state average percent passing for each of the TAAS subject areas tested during spring 1993: 76.7 percent in reading, 58.9 percent in mathematics, and 79.0 percent in writing. It should be noted that for an acceptable campus accreditation rating for school year 1994-95, at least 25.0 percent of all students tested has to pass each subject area.

(3) student enrollment greater than 750 for the middle school level and greater than 1,000 for the high school level, and

School size has been shown to be related to levels of alienation, attendance, school climate, student involvement, dropouts, vandalism, and violence (Oxley, 1994). Given this relationship, larger schools which produced high levels of achievement merit investigation.

(4) at least two years of performance data.

This criterion was necessary to establish baseline and improvement data.

Of the more than 6,300 campuses in Texas, only 350 elementary, one middle and four high schools in the state met the first two criteria. To expand the pool of secondary schools and allow for geographic representation, schools were added to the pool when (1) at least 37.0 percent of the enrollment was economically disadvantaged, and (2) the campus percent passing TAAS exceeded the state percent passing on two of three subject areas and was within 5.0 percent of the state passing rate on the third. This resulted in four additional middle schools and three additional high schools being identified for the selection pool for a total of five middle schools and seven high schools.

Dropout rates and school attendance rates from these potential sites were also reviewed against the state accountability standards for the *Recognized* rating: an annual dropout rate of 3.5 percent or less for total students and for each student group, and an annual attendance rate of 94.0 percent or higher. To remain in the pool, dropout and attendance rates had to come within 1.0 percent of the standard. From the eligible pool, three schools, one elementary, middle, and high school, were selected to represent the western, southeastern, and central areas of the state. Finally, for the three campuses selected, the proportions of students tested were reviewed since state assessment rules allow exemptions for

students in special education and those with limited English proficiency. The percentage of students tested at each campus ranged from 92.0 to 99.0 percent.

Table 1 presents descriptive information from the AEIS 1993-94 reports for the state and each site. Information from the table is highlighted below:

- Each site, represented throughout this report by a pseudonym, had a significant proportion of minority students: Adams Elementary was 87.5 percent African American; Baldwin Middle School was 43.5 percent Hispanic and 35.8 percent African American; and Chapa High School was 85.1 percent Hispanic.

- When mobility is considered, 21.0 percent of students statewide were considered mobile in 1993-94. Each case study site had slightly higher mobility rates than the state average, ranging from 22.8 to 26.1 percent.

- In 1993-94, 45.0 percent of the students in Texas public schools were characterized as economically disadvantaged. Nearly 90.0 percent of the students at Adams Elementary, 44.0 percent at Baldwin Middle School, and 37.0 percent at Chapa High School were identified as economically disadvantaged.

- Compared to the state average of 11.8 percent of students with limited English proficiency (LEP), each case study site had fewer students identified as LEP. Baldwin Middle School, with a 43.5 percent Hispanic student population, had the lowest LEP population (2.9 percent).

Table 1.
Demographic Information for Students and Teachers

		State	Adams	Baldwin	Chapa
Students					
Ethnicity					
	African American	14.3%	87.5%	16.5%	2.5%
	Hispanic	35.5%	11.6%	43.5%	85.1%
	White	47.7%	0.6%	35.8%	11.7%
	Other	2.5%	0.3%	4.2%	0.7%
Other Characteristics					
	Mobility	21.1%	23.2%	22.8%	26.1%
	Economically Disadvantaged	45.1%	89.4%	43.8%	37.2%
	LEP	11.8%	8.2%	2.9%	10.0%
	Special Education	10.7%	9.4%	15.1%	10.9%
	Bilingual/ESL	10.3%	5.8%	2.3%	7.8%
	Gifted & Talented	7.0%	0.0	8.0%	2.1%
Testing Summary					
	Tested	*	94.0%	98.0%	92.0%
	Absent	*	0.0	0.0	3.0%
	Sp. Ed. ARD, exempt all tests	*	3.0%	0.0	0.0
	Limited English Prof. exempt	*	3.0%	0.0	0.0
	Other	*	0.0	2.0%	5.0%
Teachers					
Ethnicity					
	African American	8.2%	82.6%	1.7%	4.0%
	Hispanic	14.3%	0.0	16.9%	27.3%
	White	76.9%	17.4%	81.4%	66.6%
	Other	0.5%	0.0	0.0	2.0%
Average Experience					
	Total	11.5%	13.1%	13.1%	11.2%
	In District	7.8%	11.1%	7.5%	8.8%

* Not reported statewide in AEIS. Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, 1994-95.

- Nearly 11.0 percent of students statewide were enrolled in special education in 1993-94. That percent varied from 9.4 percent in Adams Elementary to 15.1 percent in Baldwin Middle School. Bilingual/ESL enrollment at each site was lower than the state average of 10.3 percent, ranging from 2.3 percent to 7.8 percent.

- Students enrolled in special education and LEP programs may, by State Board of Education rule, be exempted from TAAS examinations. In other cases students may be absent or for some other reason do not have the TAAS examinations scored on a given administration. The percentage of students at the case study sites who took at least one of the three TAAS examinations ranged from 92.0 percent at Chapa High School to 98.0 percent at Baldwin Middle School.

Teachers

Statewide fewer than one quarter of teachers in Texas are from minority groups. At Adams Elementary where the percentage of minority teachers was significantly greater, 83.0 percent of the teachers were African American. At Chapa High School 27.3 percent of the teachers were Hispanic, 4.0 percent were African American, and 2.0 percent were from other groups resulting in a teacher population nearly one-third minority. At Baldwin Middle School 18.6 percent of the teachers were from minority groups. The average teacher experience in total years in 1992-93 for the state was 11.5 while average teacher experience was 11.2 at Chapa High School and 13.1 at both Adams Elementary and Baldwin Middle School. The average teacher tenure within the district of current assignment across the state was 7.8 years. At Baldwin Middle School the average of 7.5 years experience in the district closely matched the state average. At Chapa High School the average was 8.8 years, and at Adams Elementary the average was 11.1 years.

Teacher and Student Comparisons

Adams Elementary had the highest percentage of African American students matched with a similarly high percentage of African American teachers, 87.5 percent and 82.6 percent. Chapa High School, with the highest percentage of Hispanic students (85.1 percent), also had the highest percentage of Hispanic teachers (27.3 percent). Baldwin Middle School most closely matched the state's ethnic distributions for both students and teachers. The highest concentration of White teachers (81.4 percent), as well as lowest concentration of African American teachers (1.7 percent), occurred at this site. Given the concentrations of African American and Hispanic students at Baldwin Middle School, there is a relative underrepresentation of teachers from these minority groups.

Test Results

Test results must be interpreted in light of the number of students exempted from the state-mandated program. Under State Board of Education rule, students in special education and students with limited English proficiency may be exempted by local decision-making bodies. Baldwin Middle School, with the largest percentage of students in special education, also produced the highest percentage of students tested on TAAS, which indicates that relatively few students in special education were being exempted from TAAS tests at this school. Adams Elementary, with the smallest percentage of students in special education, had the highest percent of students exempted from TAAS. However, due to the school's small size the percentage can be misleading: a total of eleven students were exempted mainly for limited English proficiency. Chapa High School had the highest percentage of students identified as LEP and produced the highest percentage of students in bilingual/ESL programs. State Board of Education policy allows recent immigrants with limited English proficiency to delay taking the TAAS one time but does not allow exemption from the exit level (10th grade) TAAS. Chapa reported no LEP exemptions as a consequence.

Tables 2a-c presents spring 1994 Reading, Mathematics, and Writing TAAS results for the state and case study sites. Results for grades 4, 8, and 10 were used in this study, even though additional grades were tested in spring 1994, to

maintain comparability with the grades tested in spring 1993. The term "all students" refers to all students tested who were not in special education. The results reported here are for students who were enrolled at the campus as of the end of October 1993.

Across the state the largest gains between 1993 and 1994 in percent passing in reading and mathematics were seen for African American and Hispanic students, and for economically disadvantaged students. In reading these increases were led by a 10.8 percent increase for economically disadvantaged students and 10.5 percent for Hispanic students. In mathematics, gains were led by 7.4 percent for both Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students. On the writing test, the state percent passing decreased for each group except economically disadvantaged where a 0.1 percent increase was seen.

At Adams Elementary (Table 2a), on the reading test, the percentage of all students passing moved from 30.8 percent to 87.5 percent. Since tests results were available for fewer than five Hispanic and five White students, information for those student groups is not reported. The student body at Adams Elementary is comprised of almost identical percentages of African American and economically disadvantaged students, 87.5 percent and 89.4 percent, respectively, and consequently the results for these groups are almost identical. For example in reading, African American student performance increased from 34.8 percent to 90.3 percent passing, while economically disadvantaged student performance increased from 26.3 percent to 89.3 percent passing. In mathematics, the change for all students was from 26.9 percent passing to 68.8 percent. Once again African American students made significant gains, moving from 21.1 percent to 71.0 percent passing. In writing, the change for all students passing was from 85.2 percent to 87.1 percent. Given the decrease of 2.3 percent passing statewide for African American students, the increase of 3.4 percent at Adams Elementary for African American students should be noted. The percent passing among economically disadvantaged students dropped 6.1 percent, the only decline for

Table 2a.
Percent Passing TAAS: Grades 4, 8, and 10 — Spring 1994
Adams Elementary School

	State			*Adams*		
	Spring 1993	Spring 1994	Gain	Spring 1993	Spring 1994	Gain
	Grades 4, 8, and 10			Grade 8		
Reading						
All students not Sp. Ed.	69.8	76.7	6.9	30.8	87.5	56.7
African American	51.3	60.3	9.0	34.8	90.3	55.5
Hispanic	54.1	64.6	10.5	–	–	–
White	83.5	87.6	4.1	–	–	–
Eco. Disadvantaged	51.3	62.1	10.8	26.3	89.3	63.0
Mathematics						
All students not Sp. Ed.	53.6	58.9	5.3	26.9	68.8	41.9
African American	30.1	35.7	5.6	21.7	71.0	49.3
Hispanic	37.2	44.6	7.4	–	–	–
White	68.3	72.1	3.8	–	–	–
Eco. Disadvantaged	35.2	42.6	7.4	31.6	67.9	36.3
Writing						
All students not Sp. Ed.	79.8	79.0	-0.8	85.2	87.1	1.9
African American	68.1	65.8	-2.3	83.3	86.7	3.4
Hispanic	69.0	69.6	0.6	–	–	–
White	89.2	87.6	-1.6	–	–	–
Eco. Disadvantaged	67.6	67.7	0.1	95.0	88.9	-6.1

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, 1994-95.

Table 2b.
Percent Passing TAAS: Grades 4, 8, and 10 — Spring 1994
Baldwin Middle School

	State			*Baldwin*		
	Spring 1993	Spring 1994	Gain	Spring 1993	Spring 1994	Gain
	Grades 4, 8, and 10			Grade 8		
Reading						
All students not Sp. Ed.	69.8	76.7	6.9	72.4	81.3	8.9
African American	51.3	60.3	9.0	67.3	80.0	12.7
Hispanic	54.1	64.6	10.5	60.5	81.8	21.3
White	83.5	87.6	4.1	87.3	85.7	-1.6
Eco. Disadvantaged	51.3	62.1	10.8	62.6	80.3	17.7
Mathematics						
All students not Sp. Ed.	53.6	58.9	5.3	49.7	61.1	11.4
African American	30.1	35.7	5.6	43.8	62.9	19.1
Hispanic	37.2	44.6	7.4	34.4	58.6	24.2
White	68.3	72.1	3.8	66.7	63.5	-3.2
Eco. Disadvantaged	35.2	42.6	7.4	40.2	54.7	14.5
Writing						
All students not Sp. Ed.	79.8	79.0	-0.8	73.1	78.1	5.0
African American	68.1	65.8	-2.3	65.3	74.3	9.0
Hispanic	69.0	69.6	0.6	68.5	77.2	8.7
White	89.2	87.6	-1.6	81.5	79.4	-2.1
Eco. Disadvantaged	67.6	67.7	0.1	63.9	77.9	14.0

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, 1994-95.

this site, resulting in a passing rate still 20 percent above the state average.

At Baldwin Middle School (Table 2b), increases were less dramatic than at Adams Elementary. The increases in percent passing for all students were 8.9 percent in reading, 11.4 percent in mathematics, and 5.0 percent in writing. While Baldwin Middle School most closely reflected the state distribution of minority and economically disadvantaged students, it produced very different results for different student groups from results seen at the state level. In reading at Baldwin Middle School, the difference between student groups in terms of percent passing ranged from 80.0 percent to 85.7 percent, a difference of only 5.7 percent, while at the state level that difference was 27.3 percent. In mathematics, the differences in passing rates between student groups ranged from 54.7 percent to 63.5 percent at Baldwin Middle School and from 35.7 percent to 72.1 percent for the state. In writing, the differences in passing rates between student groups ranged from 74.3 percent to 79.4 percent at Baldwin Middle School and from 65.8 percent to 87.6 percent for the state. Despite having a diversity of students on campus, the achievement of the various students groups was very similar.

At Chapa High School (Table 2c), student performance increased consistently for all student groups and for all tests. The increases in percent passing for all students were 13.0 percent in reading, 12.1 percent in mathematics, and 13.6 percent in writing. This site, comprised of 85.0 percent Hispanic students, was above the state average both years for all tests. In 1994, passing rates for Hispanic students at Chapa High School were 3.8 percent above the state average in reading, 11.3 percent above the state average in mathematics, and 13.5 percent above the state average in writing. Although Chapa High School had the smallest proportion of economically disadvantaged students among the three sites, it demonstrated the largest difference in percent passing between that and other students groups in each subject area. The highest percent passing for any student group on each test was for White

Table 2c.
Percent Passing TAAS: Grades 4, 8, and 10 — Spring 1994
Chapa High School

	State			*Chapa*		
	Spring 1993	Spring 1994	Gain	Spring 1993	Spring 1994	Gain
	Grades 4, 8, and 10			Grade 8		
Reading						
All students not Sp. Ed.	69.8	76.7	6.9	59.1	72.1	13.0
African American	51.3	60.3	9.0	42.9	–	–
Hispanic	54.1	64.6	10.5	57.1	68.4	11.3
White	83.5	87.6	4.1	88.5	96.7	8.2
Eco. Disadvantaged	51.3	62.1	10.8	42.5	57.4	14.9
Mathematics						
All students not Sp. Ed.	53.6	58.9	5.3	47.2	59.3	12.1
African American	30.1	35.7	5.6	16.7	–	–
Hispanic	37.2	44.6	7.4	46.2	55.9	9.7
White	68.3	72.1	3.8	68.0	83.3	15.3
Eco. Disadvantaged	35.2	42.6	7.4	40.5	47.5	7.0
Writing						
All students not Sp. Ed.	79.8	79.0	–0.8	71.4	85.0	13.6
African American	68.1	65.8	–2.3	100.0	–	–
Hispanic	69.0	69.6	0.6	69.1	83.1	14.0
White	89.2	87.6	–1.6	96.2	96.6	0.4
Eco. Disadvantaged	67.6	67.7	0.1	59.5	72.9	13.4

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, 1994-95.

students and the lowest percent passing was for economically disadvantaged students. The differences between these two student groups ranged from 23.7 percent in writing to 39.3 percent in reading. It should be noted that, despite these differences in passing rates, economically disadvantaged students at Chapa High School surpassed the state average in both mathematics and writing by 4.9 percent and 5.2 percent, respectively. In addition, economically disadvantaged students improved in percent passing by 14.9 percent in reading, 7.0 percent in mathematics, and 13.4 percent in writing, results which exceeded the state's growth for that student group in both reading and writing in 1994.

Participants

Participants at each site included teachers, administrators, students, parents, and others in the communities who agreed to be interviewed individually or in focus groups. A total of 153 individuals participated in data collection during the initial site visits. During the second round of site visits, approximately 53 individuals provided information. Informal classroom visits were made to 43 classrooms.

Data Collection

Systematic data collection occurred through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interview protocols addressed very broad categories: mission and philosophy; curriculum, instruction and assessment; professional growth and development; organization; and student, family and community. Observations focused upon curriculum and instructional practices in classrooms, as well as on informal interactions among staff and students on campus. One hundred and seventeen public documents produced by campuses, districts, or the community and judged by participants to be relevant were also collected. Telephone contacts were maintained with campus contact persons approximately every six weeks during the school year.

Two site visits were conducted at each campus over a two-semester period. The first site visit was primarily to gather documents, conduct classroom visits, and conduct interviews and focus groups. The second site visits provided participants the opportunity to verify and update that information as they reviewed the draft report for their campus.

Comprehensive sets of quantitative data available in the Texas Education Agency were compiled for each participating site. The quantitative data provide a detailed description of each campus in terms of student and staff demographics, program enrollment and expenditures, and assessment results.

Analysis

Since this study includes multiple case study sites, the analysis procedures outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994) served to guide analysis. These include maintaining contact summary forms; coding and categorizing data; developing propositions; identifying concepts and patterns; charting cross-site factors; and drawing conclusions.

The initial categorization system for coding data was based upon a logical categories of concepts that correspond to broad categories used to structure interview protocols: Mission/Philosophy; Organization; Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Professional Growth and Development; and, Family and Community. Other information was coded into a miscellaneous category. Agreement rates for coding raw data into categories ranged from 75.0 percent before jurying to 94.0 percent after jurying. Jurying involved each researcher presenting evidence for assigning data to a particular category followed by a second independent judgment by each researcher regarding the final assignment to a category. Determining propositions and patterns was accomplished by mutual agreement between the two staff researchers.

Findings

Adams Elementary School Case Study

Adams Elementary, a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade elementary school with a population of approximately 350 students, is located in the outer reaches of a large urban area and is a designated Chapter I school due to the percentage of students participating in the national free and reduced-priced lunch program. There are 40 staff members at the school; 28 are professional staff and 11 are special education aides. The student population is almost 88.0 percent African American, slightly less than 12.0 percent Hispanic, and less than 1.0 percent White or other ethnic minority. Student enrollment is down from a high of slightly over 500 students. The faculty is approximately 83.0 percent African American and 17.0 percent White. The faculty members average 13 years of teaching experience overall, with eleven of those years within the district. The current principal has been at Adams Elementary elementary for 8 years.

A large number of families in the school's attendance zone are extended families, and at times, the mobility rate can be high, as parents of the school children move in and out of their own parents' homes depending on their job situation. Another factor in the high mobility rate is the proximity of two other school districts to the north of the school. A number of the children move back and forth between these districts, again depending on their parents' job situations. Many of the grandparents in the attendance zone are serving as guardians of the children or are helping to support both their children and grandchildren, and this generation provides stability to the neighborhood.

Businesses in the area surrounding the school are small and locally-owned, and the school must go beyond the attendance zone for business support. Although the district does promote an Adopt-a-School program, this school does not have a sponsor. They have, however, established relationships with businesses such as Pizza Hut, McDonald's, and Walgreens that, while slightly beyond their attendance zone, nonetheless actively support the school's activities and help to provide incentives for various school programs.

A Defining Characteristic

Adams Elementary is characterized by one word: focus. The curriculum is focused. The teachers are focused. The students are focused. Two years ago, the faculty decided to alter the school day to allow more time for collaboration on campus and for more time for instruction within the school day. Extracurricular activities were moved to the after-school program. The school day now goes from 8:00-3:15, Monday through Thursday, with the after-school program running from 3:15 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. on those days. On Fridays, school ends at 2:00 p.m. in order to allow for grade-level and cross-grade level planning meetings. On Mondays and Wednesdays, the after-school program provides extracurricular opportunities in fine arts or intramural sports. Teachers had a real concern about students leaving class to practice or rehearse for extracurricular activities, so they now remain after school in order to be involved. As the principal noted, "We tell the kids, 'We want you to be involved in extracurricular activities, but we want you to focus on academics.' " On Tuesdays and Thursdays, the after-school program is designated for academic subjects, essentially TAAS preparation. No other activities are scheduled after school on Tuesdays or Thursdays in order to maintain the integrity of the academic focus. Third through fifth graders work on specific curricular or TAAS objectives that are causing students difficulty. First graders identified as at risk of failure receive reading instruction and

practice. The after-school academic program serves approximately 85.0 percent of third through fifth graders, and anywhere from 15-20 first graders and perhaps one or two second graders who are still experiencing difficulties in reading. The impetus for beginning the program for the first graders was the unacceptable rate, as determined by the faculty, of first grade failure or retention. The program was held first in the spring semester of the 1993-94 school year, but in the 1994-95 year, the faculty decided to begin in the fall to provide more benefit to the students. The faculty also started the after-school program for the third through fifth graders earlier in the year so they would be in a better position to evaluate its effectiveness in helping students to achieve mastery of curricular objectives. Teachers are paid a small stipend for working in the extracurricular or academic after-school programs. They feel the TAAS prep program has been very helpful and note that parents have been very supportive of it.

Curriculum Alignment

The curricular focus of the school comes from objectives specifically measured by the TAAS tests and the state-defined curriculum, the essential elements. Each year, the school develops a curricular plan for instruction in and mastery of curricular objectives. The plan is based on deficits in student learning as measured in the previous year's TAAS results and incorporates target dates for mastery. The teachers review core curriculum guides each year and list the TAAS instructional targets in their lesson plans. In first grade, for example, the weekly vocabulary lists stressed TAAS vocabulary. The first grade faculty have also developed an annual plan for systematically addressing all grade-level essential elements. Third grade teachers taught proofreading marks to their students at the beginning of the school year and students used them to correct their own work, thus providing practice for the TAAS writing test. Fourth and fifth grade teachers integrated subjects to maximize the amount of time and the number of ways in which students are exposed to objectives, increasing the level of student mastery. Teachers in all grade levels kept charts on the students, noting their mastery or non-mastery of specific objectives and identifying concepts for reteaching, utilizing Chapter I personnel or peer tutors. As one teacher said, "We're extremely focused now, and that's different. We focus in on what we're doing and where we're going and where we want the children to be by the end of the year."

Curricular focus is enhanced at Adams Elementary by ongoing work in aligning the curriculum at each grade level with TAAS instructional targets and objectives. Three teachers, including one special education teacher, were appointed to a district-level team for a curricular alignment project over the past year. These faculty members agreed to participate in training in this area and to take an active role with the remaining Adams Elementary faculty in a campus curricular alignment project. These teachers have also agreed to serve as members of the curriculum committee on the site-based decision making team, so their training and experience can be used even more fully. Adams Elementary requested that members of its faculty be appointed to a new district team that will begin the process of looking at curricular alignment at the third grade. The faculty have made curricular alignment a priority in the coming years.

Campus-Directed Staff Development

Staff development at Adams Elementary is also focused. The school created four additional staff development days for themselves through the waiver process, and staff members agreed to report one day earlier this past year. Each campus in the district is responsible for staff development at the campus level. The faculty targeted areas they wanted to improve, based on their diagnosis of TAAS weaknesses, researched the topics, and held inservices on them. They found these inservices, based on identified campus needs, to be very helpful. According to one teacher, "These inservices give us more of what we actually need to work with the children: different objectives, more strategies, more ways to approach different kinds of learners, and a consistent focus on different learning styles."

Teachers at Adams Elementary also go off campus for inservice opportunities. They use a train-the-trainer model for maximizing the impact of off-campus inservice training, with faculty members coming back and sharing new information and techniques with other members of the faculty.

In 1993-94, inservice training focused on team building, disaggregation of data, and various strategies for teaching specific skills. During the 1994-95 school year, the faculty focused their training on technology. They wanted to go beyond the use of computers for drill and practice. Several faculty members were sent for training on the use of computers in various instructional activities. As a result, they are now able to envision using instructional technology in different ways. This kind of focus increased the value of the inservice opportunities for the faculty at Adams Elementary School.

Adams Elementary School is part of a feeder pattern or vertical team of schools composed of eight elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The feeder pattern schools follow a common schedule and meet once a year in a joint staff development conference, in addition to campus-based inservices. A committee of principals and teachers from the participant schools work together to develop, distribute, and analyze a survey of all faculty in the feeder pattern schools, identifying common needs and objectives. Based on the results of this analysis, they develop an agenda for the conference, insuring once again that inservice opportunities are based on campus-identified needs. The feeder pattern schools have held two such annual conferences. The teachers feel that this inservice has opened up new areas for exploration as well as providing them an opportunity to talk with other teachers in the district.

As a follow-up to the conference, the feeder pattern schools are exploring the possibility of meeting in various groups to discuss needs that may be more context specific. For example, they might break into groups by levels such as primary, intermediate, or secondary, or they might meet in groups based on subject area. They would like to do more vertical planning, and one proposal on the table is to find a way for the high school mathematics teachers to meet with elementary mathematics teachers. The need for such a meeting was made apparent as a result of regular feeder pattern meetings.

Using Data to Track Improvement

There is also a focus on continuous evaluation and improvement. In order to evaluate instructional effectiveness, the faculty constantly chart student's mastery of target objectives. Depending on the student's age and grade level, they are given monthly or weekly TAAS-like tests over the curricular material. The faculty analyze the tests for specific curricular objectives or individuals who need reteaching. The students note that these regular tests give them confidence, saying that they challenge them and help them build up their skills. "When the big TAAS test comes," one student said, "we'll know how to do it and how to work it."

The faculty has developed a way to provide additional academic support for students having difficulty with reading. Two teachers work with these students in small groups. As a result of the progress they are experiencing, teachers anticipate that few students will be retained in grade.

The faculty have evaluated their own standards in the classroom and analyzed what the TAAS test and other achievement tests are requiring students to do. They have moved toward objectives and materials that allow students to apply concepts, away from simple recall and computation, and toward more analyzing and evaluating. The faculty have gone beyond the textbooks and curriculum guides to bring in other resources that support their evaluation of the skills and knowledge they should be teaching. They have also brought in additional resources to address their students' perceived areas of particular instructional need. Faculty members have used school resources to purchase materials that they feel help their students in addressing tested skills and competencies, as well as adding to their general knowledge base — one area in which they feel their students are deficient. These materials are used at all grade levels. The faculty also is creating a TAAS alignment book based upon a TAAS inventory and discussion with other teachers. Each week the faculty documents by grade level and TAAS objective the successful practices used within their own classrooms. Their plan is to link their classroom practices with the TAAS objective level data that will be provided by the state. Through this process they hope to

identify what works for them and then share those practices with other teachers.

Clearly this school is committed to performing well on the TAAS test and other achievement tests as part of its overall accountability measurement. The faculty began looking closely at their students' performance in specific areas. Their aim was not just to perform well overall, but to target areas where their students were showing particular deficits. According to the principal, "You can sometimes look at the data and say, 'You know, I think we're doing o.k.' For instance, in writing we were getting a high 70 percent score, but when you look at the specific areas, we were not doing a good job when it comes to written composition. We weren't doing a good job in the area of English usage. We started looking at things that we could incorporate daily that would assist us in helping kids to do better in those areas." The principal noted that the standards for school performance were not just set by the state but by the district as well. They have a saying among the faculty that the stakes are too high to play around with innovation. They feel they have no time to make mistakes and get it right; they have to get it right going in. They used to have what the staff referred to as a "potpourri" of programs and approaches. According to the principal, "They looked great. They sounded great, but we were not making a difference."

As they began to discern weaknesses across the campus, they targeted specific areas for improvement. They initiated this process of analysis approximately three years before they were recognized for significant improvement on the TAAS test in 1994. The process was not an easy one. As one teacher noted, "We asked ourselves, 'What's wrong with the parents? What's wrong with the kids?' And we finally got to the point where we realized we had to ask, 'What's wrong with us?' It was a very painful process." The faculty worked in subgroups to analyze the situation and developed an overall improvement plan with specific objectives in target areas.

Each fall, the faculty meet in grade level groups and review the available data in order to develop an agreed-upon plan for the overall year, based on areas which needed improvement. As a faculty, they have clarified the terms they use as professionals to insure that everyone understands the problem identified, as well as the proposed responses. Once the overall plans are developed, they do allow for flexibility, but the faculty at Adams Elementary are clear from the very beginning of each school year about what they will be covering and what their goals and objectives are.

Cohesiveness and Consistency

This process of analysis and development of a focus created a sense of cohesion and allowed for the development of greater consistency throughout the school. The development of consistency had begun several years before when the faculty initiated a school-wide program of discipline management. Discipline was a major concern when the current principal first came to Adams Elementary, but over a three-year period, the faculty, working with a professor from a local university, were able to fashion and implement a discipline program based on positive incentives that is applied throughout the grade levels. Rules and consequences are posted in each classroom and in the halls, library, and cafeteria. The principal noted that she sees very few students in the office for discipline, stating, "We believe in rewarding kids, but if consequences are necessary, they will be enforced and enforced fairly."

The analysis of areas of campus weakness brought about a feeling among the faculty that they were all in the same boat. They began working on developing a more cohesive staff. They started to meet in grade level teams and cross-grade level groups on Fridays. The grade-level teams met in different parts of the building to see what kinds of activities the other grades were engaged in. As one teacher said, "We went by a 'sink or swim' model. We either all succeeded or we were all going down together, and that worked." This led to the infusion of good practices throughout the school. They removed some of the teacher-peer competitiveness and focused instead on teacher-peer cooperation and sharing. The teachers discussed different ways to present objectives after class and they began to learn from each other.

The infusion of good practices throughout the school is very evident in the classrooms, where

consistency in the use of research-proven effective teaching practices was notable. Not only were many of the same practices used, but teachers often used the same vocabulary or similar phrases when interacting with the students. Teachers across grade levels would ask students to use "million dollar words" rather than more common oral or written vocabulary. They would ask students to tell them what "strategy" they needed to use in order to find a solution or identify a pattern. When a student supplied an answer, they would be asked to explain how they determined it. They might be told, "I need to know that you know why that is correct."

In addition to the consistent focus on targeted objectives throughout the school day and in the extended day programs, the school also worked on maintaining a consistent focus on academics this past year by sending packets of daily review activities home with the students over spring break. For the most part, the effort was successful. The teachers felt that it gave the parents an opportunity to see what type of work the students were being asked to do in the classroom, particularly for younger students who do not typically have homework, and reinforced a sense of shared responsibility for student progress. One of the teachers noted that some parents had requested work for their children over the spring recess.

Another consistent practice followed by the teachers was maintaining work folders for the students which help to show progress over the course of the year. Teachers noted that it helped them in discussing a child's progress with parents during parent-teacher conferences, as well as to keep track of student development. They also noted that it helped provide a greater sense of efficacy. One student noted that the parents are very interested in looking at their work folders, and another noted that the work folders help to show that, "You really know your stuff; that you have the ability to do it."

Going Beyond the School Day

In addition to focus and consistency, a willingness to extend programs beyond the regular school day characterizes the faculty and staff of Adams Elementary. As noted previously, they have extended the school day to include after school programs which focus on academic progress as well as individual development in other areas. The extracurricular activities include fine arts programs such as drawing, drama, dance, and chorale. In addition, students have an opportunity to participate in intramural sports programs with other elementary schools in their feeder pattern, and some students are cheerleaders for those events. Students can choose which, if any, after-school extracurricular activities they wish to participate in. There is also a before-school program for students who wish to join the school's "radio" staff. These students meet before the start of each school day to prepare morning announcements for the school's public address system.

Not only do these programs extend beyond the school day, they help extend the students' experiences into the larger community as well. For example, the coach will take students to a facility beyond the local community where they have an opportunity to swim and to interact with children who live beyond their immediate neighborhood. This provides some much-needed physical and social development for students who do not have a major facility such as a local park or recreation center in the area where they can go to play. Through the fine arts program, students have gone to other schools to both perform and to see other performances. The fine arts teacher also has brought other groups in to perform for the entire student body. These groups have included a high school band, a high school drama group, and members of the local opera company.

The faculty also have extended beyond the school day through the Say Yes program, a voluntary program sponsored by the Urban Coalition that targets the areas of mathematics and science for minority and female students. Family-member participation in the program is mandatory, and the students and family members meet at the school on Saturdays to work on science and mathematics projects. Sometimes, these projects have involved field trips to local higher education campuses or other area resources such as natural history museums.

The Say Yes program has helped the school to extend in ways other than just additional time spent

outside of class on academic learning. It has helped to extend the organizational boundaries of the school to include the parents as a more integral part of its structure. The teachers have found that parents may first come to school activities as part of the Say Yes program, but as they become comfortable with the school staff and environment, they come to participate more and more throughout the school. As one teacher noted, "When parents feel comfortable around teachers, then they come around more often and that's how you get your support. The feeling among people creates the excitement that can thereby help the children." The adult family members who have participated in the Say Yes program are so supportive of the program that they have organized a Say Yes Support Team and held a series of fund-raisers throughout the year to pay for an end-of-the-year recognition banquet for the students who participated in the program. The event was held on a local higher education campus, and a representative of the National Urban Coalition attended. The school was given a model school award by the Urban Coalition. The parents noted that Adams Elementary was the only school they were aware of with a booster club for the Say Yes program. One parent was invited to speak at a regional Say Yes conference.

The extension of programs to include parents has had a noticeable impact on the students and the school climate. One of the Say Yes teachers went on to say that, "One of the things we like about the program is the feedback from the kids because it places the parent back in the role of primary teacher and creates more continuity for the child. The parents bring the unity in, not the school, because the parents are together now. The children say they no longer come to school and are in their own little group, but they all get together now in one group."

Another way in which the school extends itself to include parents is through the Chapter I Parents' Advisory Council. Because Adams Elementary is a Chapter I school, all parents are eligible to attend advisory council meetings or workshops. The school typically holds about five meetings or workshops per year. These meetings cover topics that help parents to help their children succeed in school. For example, several meetings have emphasized different learning styles. A field trip was planned for these parents to go to the district media center where they could make teaching aids to help their children at home. Parents also were given the opportunity to come in to the school's computer lab for an introduction to computers. The Parents Advisory Council targeted a special day for parents to come have lunch with their children before the Christmas holidays, and over 90 parents participated. Parents approach faculty regularly asking how they may support their children in school.

Communications with the Parents and the Community

Various grade levels interact with parents in different ways. Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers noted that they have contact with parents on a daily basis when they dismiss the children. They take that opportunity to discuss behavioral or skill-related issues with parents. Parents of kindergarten students have met in small groups during the spring to discuss what they can do to prepare their children for first grade. First grade teachers send a weekly letter home to parents, providing them with important information about the ongoing classroom activities. In addition, all teachers noted that they send progress reports home every three weeks and hold school-wide parent-teacher conferences during the year. An after school parent involvement program, "Let us help you help your child," addresses the needs of students who have trouble getting organized and adjusting to third grade. Each Thursday a different subject area is targeted. Teachers share examples of student work and explain the content. Parents have been surprised at the level and extent of content expected at this grade. Parents who attend regularly invite other parents to attend. Parents have a new respect for teachers, and teachers respond with renewed motivation.

The school also sends out a monthly newsletter to parents that provides information about upcoming activities and acknowledges students' achievements by listing honor roll students or those who have perfect attendance. Parents noted that not only did they appreciate being kept informed of the school's activities, but they also enjoyed reading the newsletter.

The school also has a number of parents it calls on to help in specific ways. A group of parents come in on a daily basis to help out with supervising students during breakfast and assist the younger students in emptying their trays. The counselor also has identified a group of parents he can call on who are willing to help get students and their families access to local agencies and community services. They may take a grandparent who cannot drive to the health clinic or take a parent to the Salvation Army in order to participate in its programs. In addition, parent representatives serve on the school site-based decision making team as required by state statute.

In spite of the ongoing efforts to reach out to parents, school staff are still dissatisfied with the level of parental involvement at Adams Elementary. Many of the teachers agreed that parents were supportive when teachers brought specific concerns about child to the parents' attention, but teachers would like to have parents involved even more fully in the school. They have tried a number of approaches, and are still looking for more effective means of involving parents. A parent-teacher organization has been reinstituted after several years' absence to foster better communication and involvement. The staff are continuing to analyze what they would like parents to be involved in and how they can assist parents in becoming more comfortably involved in academic activities. "We are finding that parents act as support persons for things that need to be done in school, but don't know that they feel comfortable coming in when instructional activities are involved," the principal said. "How do you cause that to happen?" They have also observed that the older the student, the less involved the parents are likely to be. The school is still looking for ways to be more effective in its outreach to parents.

The school nurse also has played a role in extending programs beyond the academic needs of students and beyond the school day. In addition to routine activities such as notifying parents when immunizations are due and conducting vision and hearing screenings, the nurse organized a health fair for students, parents, and other community members. Local community organizations came to the school campus to provide free screenings or information about disease prevention. Parents and students could participate in free nutritional, dental, or hearing screenings as well as pick up informational material from the American Cancer Society, the Texas Society to Prevent Blindness, and other such organizations. A health club, which stresses parent participation, has been organized by the school nurse to teach students about healthy ways of living. The nurse also conducts home visits in order to talk with parents about the health concerns of their children.

The faculty and staff help to attend to the children's needs holistically through the use of clothing vouchers redeemable at Goodwill and through the operation of a clothes closet at the school. The clothing vouchers are provided through the district and distributed to all qualifying Chapter I schools. This year, Adams Elementary received 20 vouchers, although they had 180 students who qualified for them based on their status as Chapter I students also participating in the free lunch program. To help bridge the gap between the need for clothing and the number of vouchers received, the school has established its own clothes closet. The closet is maintained by the school nurse, with clothing contributed by faculty and staff members.

Addressing the Whole Child

It becomes obvious as the faculty and staff of Adams Elementary discuss their various programs and activities that they care about their students and work to enhance their skills in a number of domains. They are dedicated to the future success of their students, and this preparation begins early. As one teacher told us, "A lot of what we do in kindergarten is to prepare them for first grade. How many kindergartners do you know who can come in and do boardwork? When our kids come from pre-kindergarten, they know how to write their first and last names. We keep a readiness notebook on our kindergarten students." The principal also noted that there was an emphasis on letters and numbers in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten in order to lower the first grade retention rate. At the same time, one kindergarten student was sent to a first grade classroom every day for reading and language arts instruction because he clearly showed his readiness for that

level of work. The principal noted, "We want to move them as far as they can go."

This philosophy applies to both the regular and special education students at Adams Elementary. The principal has told the teachers not to be limited to the district curriculum in the special education program, but again, to move the students as far as they can go. The special education teachers do incorporate academic skills in the functional skills program for those students who can handle them. Also, the special education teachers have worked hard to lay the groundwork for an increasing number of special education students to participate in regular education programs when it meets the students' instructional needs. As one teacher said, "We've had to do a lot of public relations for our students. They (regular education teachers) are under the gun with objectives and essential elements. They have to do so much by a certain time, and this child who has to have a specific treatment is in the group, so it does take groundwork." Nonetheless, the school is committed to moving students beyond remediation to accelerated growth. They are looking at how "pull out" programs can be eliminated in order to maximize instructional time for students who receive Chapter I or special education services.

The teachers also see the three-pronged move to focus on more higher-level skills, to emphasize language development, and to add to the students' general knowledge base as instrumental in preparing them for future success, whether that be measured by their mastery of objectives on the next TAAS test or their readiness for the next grade level. In fact, they are in the process of searching for a diagnostic instrument that could be used below the third grade level to give them an indication of how their students are faring. While acknowledging that this is against the state trend of not testing in the primary grades, the principal said, "Our objective is to send better-prepared kids to the next grade level. We want to know they are being successful."

The faculty feel that the TAAS test, in providing a greater challenge to students and requiring more critical thinking, is aligned with society's increasing use of technology and rate of change. This, they feel, requires a greater level of student responsibility for learning and its application. While their curriculum is focused, they believe it to be beneficial for the students, and the teachers believe that students must perform at higher levels of attainment. This is necessary in order to prepare their students to survive in an ever-changing society.

Building a Supportive Climate

The faculty and staff at Adams Elementary also provide a supportive climate for their students. The parents noted that school staff were responsive to their concerns. They also said that their children felt comfortable talking with teachers at the school. The students want to come to school, even summer school, they said. One of the special education teachers noted that they have good attendance because the students like the teachers; teachers make it comfortable for them. "We extend beyond the teaching format and become 'day mothers.' We zip, we hug, we worry, we are punitive in our stares as well as sometimes our voices, but there is always a lot of love there." Every staff member and teacher seems to know the name of every child on campus. They note that they push to give the students a lot of respect for themselves, for each other, and for the campus until it becomes a natural part of them. One teacher noted that the students look out for each other. They will tell another student, "You can't do that here, you're at Adams Elementary now."

As part of creating that supportive environment, the faculty and staff of Adams Elementary have developed a focus on the positive. One of the standing committees of the site-based decision making team is the student services committee, whose purpose is oversee and implement incentive and reward programs for students who are going above and beyond the schools expectations. They have established a good citizenship program and create and maintain displays acknowledging students who have high achievement or make the honor roll. The librarian and others videotape and photograph various student activities and the committee works to recognize students for their participation in spelling bees or plays or choir or intramural sports. They take every opportunity they can to acknowledge students. The students mentioned a number of these rewards. Several of

them mentioned the programs for good behavior, such as the performance by the area high school band or the special balloon day when each "good" student got a balloon, as being interesting activities and helpful to them. A student council provided opportunities for students to develop leadership skills and learn about democratic processes. This program, sponsored by the librarian and a teacher, also gives students opportunities to make decisions and become involved in the larger school community.

Meeting Challenges

All of this has been done against a backdrop of too few resources and significant external pressure. The extended school programs are covered by campus funds, and money must be found each year to run them. Priorities for expenditures must be established each year. The school receives an annual block grant from the district, and trying to stretch the money to cover all the program and resource needs can be a daunting challenge. Some of the budget allocations are set, which places further limits on the priority-setting process.

Staff development resources also are an issue. The faculty would like to have more opportunities for inservice beyond the campus level, including visits to other campuses that are having success using various strategies in order to observe and talk with those faculty members. Also, they had hoped to send 10 faculty members to a summer institute at a local higher education institution, but they did not have the money to do so.

The high-stakes environment is a high-stress environment. For this school, the stakes are high at both the state and district level. A great amount of pressure is felt on the campus. There is no time to experiment with programs to judge their worth. For example, they tried departmentalizing the fourth and fifth grade levels, but only tried it for one year because the results were not what they had hoped. The organizational change was completely scrapped rather than revised and tested again.

A high sense of efficacy on the part of staff has been instrumental in Adams Elementary's success. One teacher noted that, with the improvement in test scores, "We knew we were qualified, capable teachers with qualified, capable students. Irrespective of SES background or whatever, they can do it." Another teacher noted that with the rise in test scores, performance in other areas went up as well, citing examples such as increased attendance, the award for its Say Yes program, and a district-level spelling bee winner. "There's a feeling in the school that we're winning everything now. It's not just TAAS, but the whole child is winning, and it shows."

A number of the faculty cited teamwork as the real key to their success. "The key word here," one faculty member said, "is teamwork. The kids worked hard and the parents worked hard. We have a very committed faculty. People will be here until five, six, seven o'clock. They'll be here on Saturdays. There's no two ways about it. If there's a story to be told here, it's work."

Baldwin Middle School Case Study

Baldwin Middle School is located in a suburban school district in a large metropolitan area. Its student population of 850 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students is close to the state average in ethnic/racial backgrounds, and slightly above the state average in percentage of economically disadvantaged students. The school's attendance zone is comprised mostly of single family dwellings, although there are several apartment complexes in the neighborhood. The school has a number of highly mobile students due to its proximity to a military base. Faculty members and administrative staff also note that the number of students from single-parent families has increased.

Baldwin Middle School has a very stable faculty base; many of the faculty have taught at Baldwin for over ten years. Unlike the student population, the faculty is predominantly White. The school has seen various changes in administration, and the current principal has been at the school for approximately four years. The faculty provide the institutional memory for the school, having been through a number of changes in both district and school administrations.

Built in the early '70s, the school itself is a sprawling, single story building with a separate gymnasium. The wide hallways easily accommodate the students during transition time. When the student population reached its peak of approximately 1,250 students prior to the opening of a new area middle school, the hallways and classrooms were overcrowded. Both faculty and parents at Baldwin noticed a definite improvement in overall school climate when the student population decreased. Based on population growth projections, however, the school is expecting to reach its peak enrollment, or over-enrollment, of approximately 1,200 students again in two to three years. Voters rejected a bond issue that would have allowed the district to build another new middle school. The buildings are very clean and well-maintained, and the faculty noted that they work hard to instill respect for themselves and the school buildings in the students.

Faculty morale has improved with the arrival of the new principal. Before, the faculty did not have assurance that they would be supported in their decisions concerning appropriate discipline for students. In addition, the faculty feels that the school administration listens to their concerns and that they have both formal and informal channels for input into decisions. "Other than state or district mandates," one faculty member stated, "everything is voted on." The department coordinators meet monthly. The principal also established a Principal's Advisory Committee, composed of representatives from each department, which meets monthly to discuss routine, operational decisions. This frees the site-based decision making committee, known as the School Advisory Team (SAT), to focus on broader issues of school policy and program directions. The School Advisory Team, which includes parent representatives, meets at least four times per year. As a result of district policy, the SAT has equal numbers of parent and school staff representatives this year.

During the 1993-94 school year, the primary focus of the SAT was staff development and a review of campus goals. During the 1994-95 school year, the SAT focused on goal setting and evaluation, as well as looking at the school organization. Team building was a primary goal for both years. In 1994-95, the SAT moved toward being more process-focused and proactive. For the 1995-96 school year, the SAT has identified 13 areas they want to examine as a campus. They are not new issues for the school, but the SAT wants to delve into them at a much deeper level. They have decided to revisit the school's mission statement and develop one that is more clearly related to the school and would foster a greater sense of ownership and purpose in the school community.

In the past, campus improvement goals have focused on staff morale, improvement of TAAS scores, heterogeneous grouping, teaming, wellness, and overall student success. While the school will always focus on TAAS improvement, student success is a much broader goal for them. The principal noted, "The primary difference between a TAAS focus and overall student success is centered around our expectation that all students will succeed in whatever programs they are enrolled in. When we talk about academic success, we talk about all students actively involved in student organizations and activities and the school generally succeeding in making students feel good about themselves. If you look specifically at TAAS, you are only looking at skills in specific component areas."

High Expectations

The faculty and staff attribute much of the overall student success to high expectations on the part of faculty. Baldwin Middle School adopted the motto, "You can if you think you can," several years ago, and they feel it has worked well for them in engaging the students. Faculty, administrators, parents, and students all noted that the faculty did not differentiate among students on any basis, whether ethnic or socioeconomic background, ability level, or any other criteria. The principal, in speaking of the faculty, said, "They have a standard and an expectation, period. It doesn't matter when the student comes, when the student leaves, what color the student happens to be. Because of the strong bond and working together for so long, they have a common expectation for the students." One parent noted that she had never been asked to give excuses for her child's achievement or behavior on the basis of the child's background. A department coordinator stated, "Kids can learn, no matter what their socioeconomic background or race. They come to you at different levels, and you have to

start working at sixth grade for what you want them to do at seventh and at seventh for what you want them to do at eighth. So, what we've done here is say, 'You are going to be doing what sixth graders should be doing,' and that's what we teach. I might have to back up and do things again, but I'm teaching the same things. Somehow or other, they've got to learn this."

The faculty see the attainment of skills and content at each grade level as fundamental to the student's future success. And, moreover, they see a student's background as immaterial in determining whether or not a student will be able to achieve. This is because they continually evaluate their success in the area of student achievement and work to revise their practices, procedures, and organization in order to promote better achieving and more responsible students. "This is a group of teachers that is always trying to think of different ways to get students to perform," the principal said. "They just don't accept nothing as a response from students." For example, the faculty had identified a problem with the failure rate, primarily due to students not turning in their assignments. They began a program called ZAP, Zeroes Aren't Permitted, a supervised after-school program where students can make up their work and receive some credit. Students are assigned to ZAP if they are missing two or more assignments, or a student can ask to be assigned to ZAP if they feel they are falling behind in their work.

While the faculty are concerned about the failure rate due to missing work, they are also concerned about content coverage. The message they send to students is that this content must be covered; the students must do the work. One teacher said, "I tell the students point blank, 'I'm going to be on your case for every paper you owe me from now until the end of school, so you may as well do it. It's easier.' The truth of the matter is, I'm not going to have all that many kids failing in my classroom."

Student failure is unacceptable to the faculty, and they see that as part of caring for the students. And, in fact, that seems to be how the students interpret the actions and messages from the faculty. A group of students noted that they feel like teachers care about them at Baldwin and challenge them to study more and turn in their work. One teacher related the following conversation with a student who had transferred from another state. "I asked her, 'How did you do your work before you came here?' And she said, 'Well, nobody checked on us; nobody really cared whether we did our work or not.' She said, 'Yea, this is much stricter than there, but don't get me wrong — it's not bad. Nobody cared like this bunch of teachers seems to care.'"

One of the changes that the faculty has seen over time is that students are not coming to middle school on grade level, particularly in reading and mathematics. The lower reading levels have affected students' ability to understand content in other subjects such as science and social studies. Across departments, teachers have typically responded by using multiple instructional strategies, slowing down the pace of instruction, or repeating their presentation of content until students have mastered it. They have not, however, responded by reducing the concepts or content which they expect students to master.

Benefits of an Experienced Faculty

Because the faculty of Baldwin is highly experienced, they have moved beyond issues of self-efficacy and operate from a base of confidence in their professional abilities. This overall sense of efficacy and mastery of their profession has enabled these teachers to accept responsibility for the achievement of their students. While they acknowledge contributing factors in student backgrounds that could negatively affect student performance, they do not allow those factors to distract them from their goals for student achievement. They realistically acknowledge what they cannot change, and just as realistically acknowledge what they can change, and then set about doing so. Several years ago, the mathematics coordinator participated in a survey of elementary teachers and found that mathematics was being skipped and not taught everyday. Some of the elementary teachers reported feeling uncomfortable with the concepts they needed to teach. She said, "I wrote all this up and gave it to my supervisor. When I saw I couldn't change the elementary schools, I decided to change what we do. 'Let's back up; let's do some basic stuff.' It helped." In a discussion with the department coordinators, the

conversation ranged over such topics as the incoming ability levels of students, their socioeconomic background, and the changes in the level of parental involvement. At one point, one of the department coordinators said, "All of this has nothing to do with achievement," and directed the conversation to responses teachers had made to these issues such as the increased use of multiple teaching strategies.

Site-based Decision Making and an Experienced Faculty

Change can be a big issue for any faculty, and at Baldwin this has certainly been the case. Faculty noted that a number of changes have come and gone in the field of education. Many of the faculty at Bohnam have experienced them firsthand, and as a consequence, they are not eager to jump on a bandwagon without reason. They also have firsthand experience with programs and practices that they have personally found to be successful and are reluctant to abandon them. Due to the turnover in principals at Baldwin over the past six years, institutional memory of successful and unsuccessful changes resides within the faculty. The site-based decision making process at Baldwin has allowed the strengths of an experienced faculty to be used to their fullest.

In a department coordinators meeting, the faculty at Baldwin discussed the effect of their experience as a faculty on making changes. They noted that, in the end, everyone will buy in to a proposed change once they have had an opportunity to voice their opinions and get a feeling for the consensus of the group. "We all buy into it," one department coordinator stated. "If we don't buy into it, we are extremely vocal . . . having many, many years in teaching, we have our own set of ideas of what will and will not go. There are some things we jump right in and do together, and there are some things we butt heads over. But once the decision is made, we go on and do it. And, consequently, there's not as much grumbling and arguing with each other that can tear down the momentum."

The faculty have developed a professional and institutional history. Having seen problems before, they have a memory of both effective and ineffective solutions. They have seen some of the unintended consequences of "innovative programs" and are not easily caught up in the rush to adopt the latest new practice or organizational change until the issues have been thoroughly examined. Their criterion for accepting a change is whether it meets the needs of their students. They are not interested in making a name for themselves in terms of innovation for innovation's sake. However, they are interested in innovation if the innovation will help their students achieve. The faculty feel that they have a lot of input and opportunities to shape proposed changes. They believe that administrators and other teachers listen to their ideas.

Professional Development

Faculty and staff development at Baldwin is related to specific projects or needs as identified by the faculty. These needs are determined by staff survey. Recently, staff inservice has focused on heterogeneous grouping, teaming, classroom modifications for individual student needs, and TAAS analysis.

Discipline and Safety

As with most middle schools, discipline is an issue for Baldwin. The faculty and staff try to focus on getting students to take responsibility for their actions. Faculty morale has improved now that teachers feel they will be supported by administrators in their behavior management decisions. There is a consistent discipline policy throughout the school. They have computerized their discipline system so that the central office has a record of referrals and consequences for each student. This provides important context for the principal and assistant principals as they deal with any new infractions and allows each administrator to handle appropriately any student who is referred to the office. The principals have found that this record assists them in working with parents to modify student behavior. Parents can clearly see behavior patterns that might not have been communicated effectively by other means.

Baldwin established a Behavior Intervention Center which allows both the student and the teacher an opportunity to take "time out" before a situation gets out of control. It was designed for

students who are off task or are engaging in minor misbehavior that is distracting the teacher's attention from the class as a whole. The Behavior Intervention Center is staffed by a special education teacher and an aide, and teachers can send students to the center for a brief period of time, typically until the end of the class period.

The school also has an In-school Suspension (ISS) program. Students usually are assigned to the class not more than three days at a time. If they cannot control themselves during those three days, the student is usually suspended. In order to help the students keep themselves under control, those in ISS now go outside for a fast-paced walk around the school grounds after lunch each day. Also, the staff instituted an early-out incentive program that rewards cooperative student behavior and thus helps students to take control of their own behavior while they are in ISS. A telephone was placed in the ISS room so that staff could alert parents when their student had been assigned to ISS and school behavior management could be reinforced at home.

Baldwin Middle School has had a full-time police officer assigned to the campus for the past two years. The administrators note that gang activity seems to be increasing at approximately 100 percent a year. For example, two years ago, they had identified six or seven students who they believed to be gang members. The past year, they identified fourteen to fifteen. When the faculty and administrators identify students they know to be gang members or who show an interest in gang activity, they contact the parents. Because parents are so resistant to believing their child is involved in gang activity, the administrators try to present them with some kind of evidence. The school held a staff inservice on the signs to look for when students become involved in gangs.

Before 1994-95, the principal noted, students not involved in gangs did not feel safe in school. Now, the police officer issues tickets for fighting in the hallways or on the school grounds. If students are given a ticket, they must appear in court and may be assessed a fine of up to $250, or be required to perform community service, or both. Initially, students were surprised by this, although the school did send home notification to the parents. The administrators have a dialogue with student members of gangs early in the school year concerning their expectations about violence on the campus. The gangs tend to see the school as neutral territory and keep violence off the campus. A parent who is a member of the SAT noted that the administration at Baldwin has been successful in keeping down some of the violence seen in other schools because of its "no tolerance" attitude.

During the 1994-95 school year, a peer mediation program was initiated at Baldwin. One of the benefits of this program is that it increases student responsibility for behavior and can help to keep the level of conflict in a given situation from increasing. A committee of counselors, administrators, and teachers met throughout the year to make policy decisions and implement plans for the peer mediation program. Teacher mediation of student conflicts began in December of 1994, thus modeling the mediation process for students. In January, potential student mediators were recruited through the student council and from teacher nominations. Selections were made, and permission for students to participate was sought from parents during February and March. In April, peer mediation training began for the sixteen students selected for the program. After completing sixteen hours of training, they began working on some cases in May. All peer mediators sign a contract in which they agree to maintain confidentiality; fulfill all duties of the peer mediator, including completing paperwork; and maintain satisfactory conduct and grades. They are learning as they go, and the students remain enthusiastic about the program despite the fact that they find it harder to be a successful peer mediator than they initially thought.

The school also seeks to recognize and draw attention to students who conduct themselves well at school. Once each semester, the administrators organize a party for all students who have not been referred for discipline problems. The students must be completely "clean": no tardies, no gum chewing, no "nothing." Almost half the students are able to participate each semester. In the spring, they have a barbecue and have open games of basketball, volleyball, and other sports for the afternoon.

Instructional Organization

Over the last several years, Baldwin has made changes in the way teachers organize for instruction. For example, the faculty has moved to an organizational structure in which students are grouped heterogeneously for instruction at all grade levels. Also, Baldwin is working on teaming as a goal. The sixth grade is in its sixth year of organizing into academic teams and the seventh grade is in its first year. The eighth grade has decided not to team at present but will most likely reconsider organizing into academic teams next year.

Current research, combined with the depth of faculty expertise, underlies many of the organizational decisions at Baldwin. The principal participates in a district-wide principals' study group which examines topics of concern to middle school principals. Heterogeneous grouping was a major topic several years ago. The principals' study group looked at current research on the topic, and based on what the principal learned from the research, combined with the elimination of lab classes (slower-paced classes in each subject area designed for students who were low achieving) at the high school level, he decided to discuss the possible elimination of lab classes at Baldwin with the faculty. Discussions of the issue took place in the Principal's Advisory Committee, the department coordinators' meeting, and with the SAT. Based on what the research supports in terms of student learning and successful programs, the faculty voted to eliminate the lab classes and move to heterogeneous grouping of these students.

A move toward greater inclusion of special education students in mainstream classes accompanied the elimination of the lab classes. Participation in the lab classes had been almost equally divided between low-level students who did not qualify for special education and high-functioning special education students. The district and school staff see the move toward greater inclusion as moving into improved compliance with federal law. As the school has moved toward inclusion, teachers have taken on a greater sense of shared responsibility for special education students. Regular and special education faculty no longer see themselves as "us" and "them." Special education students are placed in mainstream classes based on their ability. The movement toward greater inclusion has brought forward the need for more professional development in the area of instructional modifications and manipulative-based instruction. The school has established a content mastery center where special education students can go for additional help during class time.

After a year of implementation, the faculty and staff are evaluating the overall effectiveness of the new grouping structure. While they have not seen a significant increase in the failure rate as a result of eliminating the lab classes, they nonetheless are concerned about a small population of students who do not qualify for special education services but are not quite strong enough academically to make it in the regular classroom without additional support. The faculty and administrators are trying to find a delicate balance between challenging students adequately and yet not overwhelming them. The principal noted that the skills needed to work with students in a heterogeneous setting are complex and not the kind that are easily attained through isolated inservice sessions. Thus, professional development issues have played a role in the successful implementation of this organizational strategy. Nonetheless, the faculty feel that students are best challenged in the heterogeneous classroom and have made a commitment to address the needs of diverse groups of learners. The academic teams are working to determine how best to address the needs of these students on a team-by-team basis.

Academic teaming began at the sixth grade level as a result of a district mandate. The seventh grade faculty voted to implement teaming this academic year. They divided themselves into two teams and had the freedom to design their teaming program in whatever manner they felt would best meet individual student needs. Interdisciplinary learning will be a major focus of the teaming structure. An important issue for the faculty is striking a balance between covering specific subject content and yet creating interdisciplinary connections for students. In addition to concerns about the ability to adequately cover content in a teaming situation, the faculty have also struggled with issues of the effectiveness of academic teaming in promoting student achievement. As the administrators noted,

research on academic teaming and the creation of a sense of community in schools typically shows a positive effect on student attitude, motivation, and feeling of support, but does not typically show a direct effect on student achievement as measured by instruments such as TAAS, for example. The question before the faculty is how to capitalize on the positive changes in attitude and motivation that teaming and creating a sense of community can bring about in students and use them to produce greater student achievement.

The principal did not want to move to an academic teaming structure at the upper grades until he had buy-in from at least 70 percent of the grade-level faculty. Although the SAT had endorsed the move to teaming at the seventh and eighth grade levels, the faculty still had the option to decide whether they would do so. The eighth grade will most likely reconsider the move to academic teaming next year, combined with block scheduling. Block scheduling has been implemented at the feeder high school, and staff want students to be prepared to handle longer, more in-depth class periods.

The faculty and staff at Baldwin are still wrestling with all three of these organizational changes: heterogeneous grouping, greater inclusion of special education students, and the expansion of academic teaming and interdisciplinary learning to other grade levels. As part of the move to heterogeneous grouping several years ago, the district eliminated separate gifted and talented classes. However, due to parent protest, the classes were put back into the district budget. Therefore, gifted and talented students are not heterogeneously grouped in the regular classroom. Also, there is a culture among the faculty and staff of continuous evaluation and improvement. One teacher noted, "There is a pattern year after year. It's the modification of programs, the reorganizing. It's this will work; no, this will work better. Because we have been here long enough that all of us can feel free to say, 'Hey, I think I see a situation here that we need to do something about.' Sometimes we're very successful in stemming it from getting worse or we are able to improve the situation, and other times, it's back to the drawing board."

At-risk Students

Student attendance is high at Baldwin. The attendance secretary has made a strategic decision to target sixth graders who begin to show a pattern of absenteeism. She noted that if they can influence the students' attendance patterns early in their middle school careers, they typically maintain good attendance as seventh and eighth graders. A visiting teacher makes visits to the homes of students who seem to have trouble attending on a regular basis.

The faculty and staff at Baldwin participate in a mentoring program for students who have been identified as "at-risk" of failure and dropout. As mentors, staff members spend approximately 10-15 minutes a week with their assigned students, checking on their progress and attempting to resolve any problems the students may be having. They turn in a monthly log of the meetings to the at-risk coordinator.

The dropout rate for Baldwin is very low. In fact, Baldwin had no dropouts reported in their latest accountability report. The dropout coordinator at Baldwin works to track down students who have withdrawn from school to ensure they are enrolled in another school. The counseling office notifies the dropout coordinator and the assistant principal when a student withdraws from school and lets them know where the student intends to re-enroll. The dropout coordinator confirms their enrollment in the new school and then removes the student from the dropout list. Although she has other duties as a special education aide, the dropout coordinator spends part of her time each day trying to track students down and determine where they are currently going to school. She has been commended by the district for her effectiveness in finding students once they've withdrawn.

Student Engagement and Motivation

The faculty and staff at Baldwin Middle School understand the importance of student engagement in the school and developing the whole child. In addition to academic teaming, the school promotes student participation in a number of extracurricular activities. The staff estimate that approximately 70 percent of the students participate in at least one

extracurricular activity. The choir and band programs are particularly strong, with over half the student population participating in either the choir or the band. Extracurricular programs include fine arts opportunities, such as the choir, band, and drama programs; athletics programs for both boys and girls; and various clubs for students with particular interests, such as journalism or computers. The school also operates an after-school intramural program for students, particularly those at risk, who may not involve themselves in other extracurricular activities.

Through the physical education classes, the sixth grade students are introduced to a twelve-week course, "Skills for Adolescents." This course covers such topics as self-confidence, communication skills, managing emotions, improving peer and family relationships, goal setting and developing potential, and living healthy and drug-free. The unit also includes service activities.

Student motivation is a problem that has not escaped the attention of the faculty and staff at Baldwin. In addition to the long-term efforts to increase student engagement and motivation through organizational changes such as teaming and through promoting student involvement in extracurricular activities, Baldwin engaged in a short-term motivational strategy that met with success and gained the school quite a bit of publicity. In 1992-93, the mathematics department began a campaign designed to get the students' attention. The mathematics faculty felt that the students knew more about mathematics than they were typically demonstrating. Teachers wanted to focus the students' attention on learning and get them enthusiastic about proving their knowledge and skills on the TAAS mathematics test. The faculty challenged their students to learn more mathematics and to prove that they had by increasing their TAAS mathematics scores by 8 percent. If the students met the challenge, the principal and vice principal (males) agreed to dress up as women and the female assistant principal agreed to kiss a pig. The students met the challenge by increasing the pass rates for TAAS mathematics from 49.7 percent to 61.1 percent, an increase of 11 percent. In addition, the percent passing TAAS mathematics for some student groups exceeded 20 percent. This was in spite of a statewide trend for mathematics achievement pass rates to decline in the middle grades compared with elementary schools. Not only did students increase their mathematics scores, but they increased their reading scores by almost 9 percent and their writing scores by 5 percent. When the scores were announced in the fall of 1994, the administrators fulfilled their part of the bargain. The male administrators dressed as women, and the female administrator kissed the pig at a back-to-school night so that many of the former eighth graders could come back to see the results of their hard work. Parents reported that the challenge did indeed get students' attention, and they reported that their students worked harder as a result. The students were apparently quite thrilled by the administrators' willingness to fulfill their part of the bargain. This past year, although the school did not repeat the challenge, the students showed a 4 percent gain in both reading and writing, and a 1 percent gain in mathematics scores.

The school received much publicity as a result of the challenge, not all of it positive. While the members of the school community understood the context and purpose of the challenge, others did not. In one editorial, the faculty and administrators were accused of "groveling at the altar of standardized testing" and as engaging in a desperate attempt to improve TAAS scores, even at the expense of their personal dignity. The mathematics coordinator responded to the columnist, noting that the school was not desperate for improved test scores, and in fact had won an award for their TAAS scores two years prior to the challenge. She also noted that the faculty had focused on improving student performance in mathematics for two years, beginning with developing student self-confidence through the "You can if you think you can" campaign. She wrote, " . . . this challenge rallied students behind a central goal of greater success in mathematics. In the process, they did try harder on a standardized test that means nothing to them at this age, but will mean a great deal to them at the high school level if they do not have the mathematics knowledge to pass the TAAS Exit test and graduate." The local paper did not publish her response.

Curriculum Articulation in Mathematics

The mathematics faculty began working on curriculum realignment two years ago. One of the first tasks they undertook was to restructure the sequence of concepts they teach in the eighth grade and emphasize the connections of those concepts to pre-algebra applications. This was in response to the elimination of a pre-algebra sequence at the feeder high school due to a state mandate. The current adopted textbooks do not handle the content in this way, so the mathematics faculty have turned to supplementary material and out of adoption textbooks which they are using as class sets. The faculty do not feel there is consistency in the scope and sequence of the mathematics curriculum at the middle grades, and they are also looking at restructuring the scope and sequence of concepts at the sixth and seventh grades.

The mathematics department coordinator also began to talk with district personnel about the need to realign the mathematics curriculum district-wide. Middle grade mathematics teachers are frustrated by the current scope and sequence of the curriculum; they do not feel that it is producing students who are able to master concepts and applications. The mathematics coordinator said, "We talked with our supervisor over and over about it. We had these thick guides that are very nice for the beginning teacher—and I've even written some of them, so I understand—but here is the problem, even that is not a well-connected sequence. You have a little of this here and later on you see the algebraic application. What the child needs is a good sequence that allows them to see how they can use the concept in problem-solving or how they can use it algebraically. That's what the faculty is trying to do here. At the same time, we said that all the schools are going to need this, so we can do it as individual campuses or we can do it collectively." As a result, the district is coordinating an effort to realign the curriculum.

Part of the issue of curriculum alignment is not only the alignment of scope and sequence within and across grades, but the alignment of the essential elements with the TAAS assessment objectives. Teachers reported that the essential elements are too broadly written and cover too much content; they leave too much to individual teacher interpretation in terms of the specific application to be mastered and they ask for mastery of too much content at each grade level. They reported that teachers feel lost in terms of which essential elements truly are essential in terms of the state assessment system. They do not feel that students have sufficient mastery over basic content, particularly in the core subjects of reading and mathematics, by the time they reach middle school. In part, they believe, this is due to elementary teachers being asked to cover too much content. They would prefer that elementary teachers be allowed to focus on full mastery of basic foundational skills in the early grades, so that content can be expanded in the middle grades.

Parental and Community Involvement

Baldwin has seen some changes in the overall level of parental involvement over the last few years. As the percentage of single parents has increased, direct school involvement has lessened somewhat. Nonetheless, parents, teachers, and administrators all reported that parents of Baldwin students were very interested in their students' educational experiences at Baldwin. Parents want their students to be involved in extracurricular activities, and attendance is high at meetings and special presentations in which students are performing. Teachers report that parental response to concerns raised about individual students is typically good, and parents report that teachers and administrators respond quickly to their concerns and handle them in a professional manner.

Baldwin would like to increase its overall level of parent and community involvement and is participating in a district partnership program. The goal of the program is to increase community partnerships and provide opportunities for involvement in school operations. The PTA is one of the school's partners, and the focus of the PTA in the last year has been primarily student achievement and developing student leadership. Parents are directly supporting the social studies department, and a group of parents is also directly involved with the school's content mastery center. There has been some local business support to purchase equipment, such as computers and printers, and the school hopes to increase this

support. One of the ways in which the school seeks to connect with the community is by scheduling the school playing fields for community intramural sports.

At Baldwin, differences in community support can be divided into the immediate neighborhood and attendance zone, and the larger district and urban community. The faculty and staff of the school feel supported by community members in their immediate attendance zone, and members of the community report that they feel confident in the professionals in the school and feel that the school is working hard to provide a safe and quality education. However, school staff and members of the community both report that they do not feel that the school is held in very high regard within the larger district and city communities. They feel that the school largely goes unnoticed and that many of its accomplishments are not fully recognized. This has had some effect on faculty morale.

Chapa High School Case Study

Chapa High School is located in a large urban school district. The campus enrolls approximately 2,000 students, of whom 87.0 percent are Hispanic and 37.0 percent are economically disadvantaged in grades 9-12. Although the school's immediate environment contains a substantial base of well kept single-family homes, the attendance zone for Chapa High School contains housing that ranges from substandard to high-cost. Because many homes are occupied by their original owners, the neighborhood contains numerous retired adults who, because their children are grown, have few immediate ties to the school.

The faculty at Chapa High School is slightly more experienced than the average teacher in Texas. Although the number of Hispanic teachers is double the state average, the faculty is predominantly White. The majority of current campus administrators have been assigned to this campus within the past four years.

The school facility is surrounded by a large open area, fronted by a boulevard and city park. The facility is a two-story building with several ancillary buildings used for specific program areas. The current enrollment is well within building capacity, allowing the administration to provide permanent space for the student government, as well as break and meeting areas for the custodial staff.

As recently as four years ago, at the time the current principal and several new administrators were assigned to this campus, faculty and administrators described the school as uninviting, unattractive, and "just plain dirty." The campus suffered the common complaints of many urban high schools: trash collecting in the parking lot and halls, and graffiti defacing campus walls and lockers. With the assignment of a new principal and administrative staff, improving the appearance of the campus became the top priority. When the custodian, who had been asked to paint walls, clean windows, and polish the floors, responded that this was not possible, the new principal changed the custodian's assigned duties. The physical plant is now attractive, neat, completely without graffiti or paper in hallways or on the grounds. The principal and other administrators continue to monitor the facility and serve as role models, automatically stopping to pick up litter without interrupting their ongoing conversations as they move through the campus.

Initiating Change

Although the faculty, parents, and administrators describe the school's transformation in terms of the principal's influence, the improvement initiative, in reality, involved everyone on campus in fundamentally changing the culture of the school. The principal described his role as giving the staff "permission to take risks," essentially "empowering them to make decisions they had not made before." According to the principal, the campus has a team now that is "hard to stop." Instead of having one chief administrator and three assistant principals, the principal says that this campus administration functions as a team of four principals, each of whom is able to see a problem; initiate discussion of options among faculty, students, and other staff; inform the principal of their recommendations; and carry through with a new initiative. Reaching this point was not easy nor accomplished overnight: the change process addressed the most basic of

educational needs, creating a safe learning environment.

Safety and Discipline

The most fundamental challenge to the school's success rested in the social environment. Gang problems typical of many urban high schools, extending from graffiti to weapons and hard narcotics, constantly threatened the campus and are still reported within the attendance zone. According to the faculty, a small group was causing significant problems which affected the atmosphere for all students, faculty, and the surrounding community. Four years ago, these problems were so severe on campus that students were afraid to walk down the hall or go to the parking lot, fearing harassment by gang members. Students were reluctant to participate in extracurricular activities because they had to cross gang territory to get home from the school. Campus discipline was described as lax. Many students in the feeder schools chose to attend private schools rather than enroll at this campus. Students had poor attendance, and faculty frequently could not reach their parents to discuss problems. Due to its proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border, approximately 10.0 percent of the students with limited English proficiency had not attended any school previously, and, therefore, lacked basic school socialization skills. One faculty member described the campus four years ago as a "catch-all" school where students who did not attend one of the special emphasis schools ended up. As a consequence of these circumstances, students and their families felt no loyalty to the campus.

The faculty attribute the successful transformation to a safer school to the new administrators' willingness to face problems. According to the faculty, until the current campus administration was assigned to the school, gang problems were ignored and denied. Admitting that the problems existed and threatened the safety of the students and staff was the beginning of a long, difficult process to regain control of the school. Establishing a safe environment at the campus required changes in the physical environment, as well as in school policies and programs. At the most basic level, the school sought to eliminate all signs of gang activity, from removing graffiti from walls of the school to removing gang insignia from students' clothes. Not only did the school clean up its own building, but school personnel also sandblasted surrounding homes, removing graffiti which marred the general appearance of the neighborhood. School personnel also assumed responsibility for the park area in front of the school, again eliminating gang signs and trash. As a result, the immediate neighborhood, including the school plant, is clean, attractive, and free of spray-painted gang insignia.

A more difficult adjustment concerned significant changes in the school's discipline policies, requiring increased accountability from all students and faculty. By common agreement, teachers stated that in the past the attitude toward discipline was lax on the part of both faculty and staff. Stricter discipline also lacked support from parents. Soon after arriving on campus, the principal established a communications committee as a subcommittee of the Campus Improvement Team. That committee quickly identified the variation among teachers in their rules regarding wearing caps as one problem contributing to poor discipline. Some teachers allowed students to wear caps in class and some did not. This variation in rules from classroom to classroom caused considerable difficulty for those teachers enforcing their "no caps" rules. The principal took very seriously the issues raised by the communication committee. After much discussion within the Campus Improvement Team and across the faculty, a compromise dress code was developed: students would be allowed to wear caps on campus outside school buildings but not inside, and students would not be allowed to wear clothing with gang insignia or negative messages. Teachers agreed to consistently enforce the dress code, including the policy on caps. In addition, strict attendance and tardy policies were instituted and enforced consistently. In other areas clearer procedures placed more responsibility on students to turn in their work and come to class prepared with all necessary materials.

Coordinated efforts of teachers and administrators contributed to the success of the new policies. A critical component of this successful change in policy was the fact that the administration stood behind teachers when they enforced the new rules.

The united efforts of teachers and administrators resulted in consequences for students who engaged in insubordination. Previously, a student could misbehave and nothing would happen; there was no consequence. This change signaled to teachers that "we could discipline students and the administration will back us up." The first years of the new policy were very stressful, described by one teacher as a "state of war" with students and some parents. The battle was won by repeated communication with parents about the new rules and the reasons for them. Now if a student gets into trouble at school, teachers feel that parents support them. The new policies, which strive to balance student rights with the needs of the school community for an ordered learning environment, have affected fundamentally the operations of the school and, according to faculty and administrators, paved the way for their students' academic success. According to the faculty, there is an ongoing need for consistency from all faculty and for monitoring discipline by administrators if the current environment is to be maintained and improved. The disciplined environment permeates the campus to the extent that new students and faculty find it difficult to imagine the extensive problems so prevalent just four years ago.

Not only are teachers on campus supported by campus administrators, but campus administrators have been supported in their efforts to improve discipline by district level administrators. Two incidents received local attention as students were disciplined for rule infractions. Both cases involved student leaders whose behavior did not meet standards of acceptable conduct on this campus. Their punishments involved significant loss: removal from a sports team and removal from a class office. When these decisions were challenged by students and their parents before the local school board, the decisions of the campus administrators were upheld. This had a significantly positive impact upon the school climate. According to campus administrators, those events signaled that the school has "standards that we all live by; they are not just for some students." It showed that all students were treated fairly, that there was not one set of standards for economically disadvantaged students and another for wealthy students. After the school board upheld campus decisions, the school received telephone calls from its parents saying that they were glad to have their children attend a school where standards of behavior came before winning a game. The campus also received supportive telephone calls from others in community, adults without students attending the campus.

As part of the comprehensive effort to reestablish safety and discipline on campus, the school initiated a Crimestoppers program. This program is managed on campus by one of the assistant principals who had extensive experience in law enforcement prior to becoming a school administrator. The program purposely appeals to students' pride in the school and community. The program has been so successful that many participants do not accept the reward offered for information about criminal activities. Administrators report that the students just want to stop the problems around their school. Before starting the Crimestoppers program, the school staff visited another district with a successful program. The Crimestoppers program was then introduced to the school and community through a presentation from local police, describing the kinds of criminal activity they were encountering in the area. From the beginning, the Crimestoppers program has been very successful, leading to the identification of juvenile offenders within hours of criminal activity, such as vandalism at a local recreational facility or tagging on the campus. Faculty have reported overhearing juveniles discussing the Crimestoppers program throughout the community. The students' discussions recount the impossibility of getting away with anything, even tagging, on the campus due to the Crimestoppers program.

To further address safety and discipline on campus, the faculty and administrators restructured the Alternative Center, an on-campus instructional setting for students who have been removed from regular classes, usually for behavior problems. Like most alternative settings, students engage in independent seat work, are not allowed to leave the room alone, sign a behavior contract specifying classroom discipline rules, and take meals within the classroom. The program offered in the Alternative Center was redesigned so that students would not lose elective, P.E., or, because of the laboratory requirements, science credit because

they were assigned to the center. In addition, the core subjects are supported by assigning a subject matter or a special education teacher each period to the center. Faculty feel that students are not developmentally ready for the demands of high school, contributing to their problems in class. The Alternative Center offers daily instruction in social development skills as part of the regular curriculum for the center's students. The at-risk coordinator also spends one hour each day in the Alternative Center working with students.

The ongoing need to monitor and respond to potentially negative behavior situations is fully recognized. When the school administrators identified too many students hanging around the parking lot during lunch as a problem, the principal arranged for the vocational department to make benches and placed them near the cafeteria, clearly a more easily monitored location. Students moved their lunchtime socializing to a safer, as well as more comfortable and attractive area. As on most campuses, teachers continue to provide monitoring of these common areas during lunch.

Finally, as a part of the comprehensive plan for increased safety on campus, the number of security personnel was increased from two to three individuals. This allowed more frequent patrols around the campus. Due to the size of the campus, golf carts are used to increase the efficiency of these patrols.

The campus administration, faculty, and students, through their combined efforts, have created a safer environment, motivated by the twin needs of balancing student rights with a strong program of discipline. Students now choose to attend this school because of its reputation as a safe educational environment, rather than enter a private school. Faculty stated that the "neighborhood kids are nice kids, someone just needed to bring that out." The faculty, administrators, other staff, and students feel that the school now sets a good tone, providing a safe environment and freeing students to excel academically. Community members commented positively on the presence of teachers on campus early in the morning or after school to tutor and meet with students who needed help. Teachers are at all school events, "cheering them on." The continuing need to be vigilant about safety is underscored by the 1993-94 Campus Improvement Plan, which listed drug and gang awareness as its second goal.

Vertical Teaming

The unusually strong connections between this campus and its feeder schools defines a philosophy of shared responsibility for student success. The sense of shared responsibility encompasses not only teacher-to-teacher and administrator-to-teacher connections, but also includes school-to-school connections through the system of feeder schools. The vehicle for school to school sharing of responsibilities is the Chapa Attendance Zone Committee. The attendance zone committee was initiated by the new principal to establish a network among the high school and its seven feeder schools which focuses upon strengthening the core academic areas. Initially the principals met to discuss the question, "What can we do to help kids?" Their discussions led them to consider the value of a similar forum for teachers. Initially, two teachers from each campus began to meet periodically during the last hour of the school day. Teachers reported being frustrated at the first meetings with the lack of direction, agendas, or objectives that would make spending their valuable time more palatable. Although initial meetings were characterized by "playing the blame game" and accompanying defensiveness, an understanding that they and their students faced mutual problems and issues soon developed. They saw the possibilities that simply having a time set aside for discussion would present, such as getting to know other teachers and sharing methods and ideas that worked with their shared student population. After the committee spent a period struggling to define an appropriate role, they approached administrators and suggested that the group develop an annual staff development event. At this point, teachers were not yet convinced that administrators would be willing to devote resources and time to implement the ideas generated by a group of teachers. However, they were pleased to have their suggestions met with strong support from administrators.

After three years, the Chapa Attendance Zone teacher group continues to meet monthly, usually

outside school hours. The meetings, which are attended by two teachers from each school, rotate among campuses and other sites, giving teachers the opportunity to see what teachers at other levels are doing and what work students are expected to produce at different grade levels. This committee has developed into a strong team, which actively seeks input from faculty on each campus in the design of each year's program. Faculty on the planning committee reported that, while committee participation is a lot of work, it is worthwhile. Administrators look to the committee members for expertise and greet all discussions with "an open mind," accepting disagreements while continuing to strongly support the group process. As a result of this planning and input, teachers attending the joint staff development sessions feel their specific needs are being met much more effectively than in the past. A goal for some on the planning committee is to arrange for teachers to visit other schools in the attendance zone and to observe other teachers during classroom instruction.

The Chapa Attendance Zone staff development meetings have emphasized sharing among teachers, addressing in particular the articulation of subject matter across school levels. In addition to sharing basic information about the programs and the specific curriculum offered by each campus, faculty from different levels discussed their frustrations with the skill levels of their students. High school teachers did not understand how students could appear in their classes with basic deficiencies, while elementary teachers were unaware of the specific skills and skill levels expected by high school teachers. Teachers stated that, as a consequence of the joint staff development sessions, they understood much better the necessary academic foundations, in terms of specific skills expected by teachers following them. Faculty at one feeder campus learned that they needed to strengthen their students' skills in writing research papers. They decided upon a common format for research papers and added a six-week project on research papers for the next school year. In another case, because elementary teachers learned from middle school teachers that their students were not making the transition to departmentalized classes well, the elementary school decided to departmentalize the 5th grade. Teachers strongly value the opportunity to share their own expertise and repeatedly acknowledge the benefits they have gained from others working with similar students. In addition, teachers place a high value on the networking and camaraderie that has developed across their own campuses and across the attendance zone. This is especially true among those faculty serving on the attendance zone planning committee for staff development.

Vertical teaming is now an integral part of the fabric of these schools. Job-alike meetings are now held for librarians and counselors, as well as teachers and administrators. Teachers at all grade levels meet with others teaching in their subject matter, creating a sense of integrated community across all campuses. Parents, teachers, and administrators at the high school and at feeder schools attribute the new sense of openness and shared purpose at the schools to the attendance zone committee's work. That shared purpose and responsibility for student success or difficulty has become automatic across campuses, allowing educators access to a strong professional support network. When a student from one elementary feeder school has trouble at middle school, the elementary principal is invited to consult and attend meetings with the student and his or her parents. Recognition for one school is recognition for all schools. When the high school received a Texas Successful Schools Award System award, a commendation from the state for improved TAAS scores accompanied by a considerable sum of money, the entire attendance zone felt they shared credit for the recognition. In addition to the TSSAS award, the high school was nominated to apply for Redbook's America's Best Schools Award. At the time of the verification visit by the research team, the application had advanced to the second level of review for that reward.

The success of the attendance zone committee has been noted across the district, resulting in numerous inquiries for information. Other schools in the district are beginning to adopt the attendance zone concept patterned after the Chapa Attendance Zone program. In the words of one principal, "The attendance zone committee has shown us there is life after TAAS, that we need to integrate thinking skills across the board so that a good academic foundation is formed."

It is clear that the principals and those serving on the attendance zone committee have formed a concept of the professional community that reaches beyond the campus and addresses the needs of the entire attendance zone as one entity. The campus contact person at each site in this study was asked, within broad guidelines, to arrange the agenda, asking teachers, parents, administrators, and students to spend time with the research team. The site visit for Chapa High School included visits to three feeder schools in addition to the expected visit to the high school campus. The faculty and staff have come to realize that what goes on at each feeder campus affects what happens at the high school. The high school faculty realize that their success is embedded in the success of the feeder schools and have made the commitment to build that foundation. The result is a highly coupled system.

Responses to Academic Needs

Responding to the academic needs of students drives improvements in curriculum and instruction at Chapa High School. Performance in mathematics on the TAAS, although impressive when compared with other urban high schools of its size and demographic characteristics, was less than acceptable to either faculty or administrators. Some faculty attributed the students' difficulty with TAAS mathematics test to its increased emphasis on reading comprehension. Not only did students have problems with the state administered assessment, their performance on classroom evaluations was also problematic. Twenty-two percent of ninth graders were retained. As recorded on campus grade reports, most failures occurred in Algebra I. Teachers were frustrated by the poor performances, but did not want to "lower their standards." They decided to provide extra help, including tutoring for core subjects which now occurs most mornings and afternoons. As student performance improves, faculty expectations continue to rise as their efforts increasingly target program enrichment rather than skill remediation. However, the first goal on the Campus Improvement Plan continues to be improving TAAS scores to meet the state standards.

Several program changes at Chapa High School were specifically designed to improve skills in mathematics. When the State Board of Education removed pre-algebra from the list of courses which could be counted for graduation credit, this campus eliminated that below-level course one year earlier than required by the state, because of the "principal's high expectations" for the students. To replace that course, a blocked ălgebra class was developed, which required two periods per day, the usual mathematics period plus a study hall. Failure rates for this intensive algebra class were much lower than those of the regular algebra classes: 31.0 percent compared to 45.0 percent. However, since students had to use two class periods for one graduation credit, some students felt that this arrangement was putting them behind on their graduation schedule and withdrew after the first semester. Another option was developed to meet students' needs: a paced algebra class coordinated with the feeder middle schools. Because algebra is spread over the eighth and ninth grades, students devote only one hour per day to mathematics each year, receive credit at the end of the ninth grade, and continue to earn the suggested number of credits each year to be on schedule for graduation. This is a clear example of the continuous process of seeking better ways to respond to student needs.

As the faculty sought additional ways to prepare students to pass the mathematics portion of TAAS, they identified problems with reading comprehension as a major barrier to improved mathematics test results. The emphasis of state mathematics assessment has moved from calculation to problem-solving, and, as a consequence, test items contain much more text than they did previously. Some regular mathematics classes have begun to use the same textbooks as the honors classes since, according to mathematics faculty members, these books are more traditional in their presentation of mathematics concepts, accommodating students' lack of reading comprehension more effectively and providing more practice in basic skills.

In addition to the changes in the mathematics program, changes also were made in other curriculum areas.

- For the first time in several years, the science faculty reinstituted a science fair,

and approximately 150 students participated.

- The program for students with limited English proficiency (LEP) was redesigned by the district, and several teachers were brought to this campus to implement a "no excuses" program philosophy. A clearer focus on the essential elements addressed concerns that LEP students were not receiving an adequate opportunity to learn the content required by the state and tested through the state assessment program.
- In addition, a practice called sustained silent reading (SSR) was implemented at the suggestion of the Campus Improvement Team: everyone on campus read for a specific period each day, including faculty and administrators. After a trial period, the decision was made to discontinue the SSR, an example of the "let's try it" attitude of the faculty and administration, and address the need in another way.
- Each student is now expected to read 500 pages each six weeks, an increase from 250 pages three years ago, and prepare either a book report or a book talk for English class. Reading time is set aside in all English classes for this purpose.
- A content mastery room has been established and used by approximately 80.0 percent of the students with disabilities on campus. In this way, more students with disabilities are mainstreamed and provided support for their class assignments in the core academic areas.
- A Writing Center has been added with new computers and software to support English, resource, English as a second language, study skills, and special education classes.
- A new accelerated literature program has been implemented. A computer software program coordinates literature suggestions for students at various grade levels with post-reading assessment.

Using the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) Campus Summary Report as a source of information about the school's performance has become common practice at Chapa High School. Based upon the review of student performance by the Campus Improvement Team and other faculty, the faculty addresses TAAS deficiencies in several ways. TAAS camp is held on Saturdays, and incentives, such as pizza, are provided to encourage attendance. All junior and seniors who have not passed TAAS are encouraged to attend Saturday camp. The faculty also strongly recommends to parents that they should encourage their children to attend. During the Saturday TAAS camps, teachers review the material covered by the TAAS test and stress test taking skills. The campus has both developed and purchased specific review materials keyed to the TAAS objectives. Faculty and administrators described a large program of formal and informal tutoring provided largely by volunteers: peers, teachers and administrators. The Saturday TAAS camp stresses reading comprehension for all students whether they are studying for the reading or mathematics TAAS test. According to one tutor, "students don't understand what the test is asking. They do not have word meanings at the level tested, so they need to learn how to find context clues. The answer is often in the passage, but they don't know how to get meaning from the passage."

Problem areas identified through TAAS also receive emphasis in classes other than mathematics. A list of deficiencies identified by TAAS objective is given to all teachers so they are aware of areas needing extra attention. A diagnostic reading test is administered to all incoming freshmen, and results are shared with teachers, students, and parents. Students who fail a TAAS test have been scheduled into a study skills class designed specifically for that test area. Teachers of the study skills classes receive an individual report for each of their students so they can provide more targeted assistance. Three computer laboratories supplement language, writing, and mathematics skills, as well as specific preparation for TAAS objectives.

One goal of the faculty is to internalize higher expectations for students to go beyond minimum state graduation requirements. In addition, faculty said they should automatically convey these higher expectations to students: "Of course, you will take four years of math," rather than the state minimum graduation requirement of three years. All students are encouraged to take the Scholastic Achievement

Test (SAT) and more than 60.0 percent of the seniors do so.

In addition to curriculum changes, a new emphasis has been placed upon the effective use of instructional time. Both the principal and the Campus Improvement Team independently raised the concern that some teachers were not making the best use of valuable instructional time, allowing students to socialize and failing to systematically address the essential elements. Under the prior administration, teachers were expected to prepare lesson plans; however, the administrators rarely reviewed them. Currently, lesson plans are posted by the classroom door, and administrators make a point of reviewing them as they visit classes informally. Improving instruction also has become one of the stated goals of the Campus Improvement Team. "Teachers know the lesson cycle and have used it for years during teacher performance evaluations, but choose to teach by just starting talking, not asking questions to see whether students really understand." The Campus Improvement Team stated that all teachers should be expected to use the "lesson cycle," a common, systematic instructional model, and that the "lesson cycle must become a habit" with the faculty. Because the goal of student learning is for students to be able to use their knowledge, the campus improvement team felt that the systematic use of the lesson cycle would help achieve this goal.

Organization

Several significant organizational changes have been made to allow staff members greater freedom to address campus improvement. Department chairs, who in the past had been mainly responsible for ordering materials, were immediately engaged in developing the five-year plan for the campus. This involved prioritizing needs and planning ways to meet those needs. Over the past four years department chairs began assuming more responsibilities, including developing a vision and mission with their departments, developing and implementing departmental plans for improvement, managing their departmental budgets, and developing staff development based on these plans. Preparing the department chairs for these additional responsibilities necessitated extensive informal discussions and negotiations between the principal and department chairs over several years. This process of change has produced a cadre of capable, increasingly confident department leaders. Departmental improvement efforts are occurring independent of the front office. Campus-wide improvement efforts have progressed to the point where the leadership no longer emerges from the principal but from the faculty, resulting in even higher levels of dedication, excitement, and skill within the faculty.

Changes during the first four years of the principal's tenure also included substantial personnel changes: two assistant principals arrived with the principal and two others joined the staff after his arrival. Several of those serving as assistant principals with this principal at Chapa High School have been promoted based upon the enhanced reputation of this school across the district, as well as the recognition received by their work at Chapa High School. Replacements within the administrative staff continue to support the emphasis upon safety, discipline, and academics. This change in administration clearly is seen by the faculty to be positive, since "discipline was lax and the backing was not there" under the previous administration. When the custodians were unable to meet the new principal's expectations for a cleaner, more pleasant environment, the custodial staff received new personnel. In addition, some personnel holding department chair positions have changed during the same time period. At least one program area received an infusion of new talent as the district program was redesigned and some new teachers were brought in to implement the redesigned program. Some faculty new to the school acknowledge the principal as one reason why they transferred to Chapa High School. The importance of having the right personnel for the job is illustrated by the principal's persistent pursuit of one individual to fill an administrative vacancy. Although the individual initially refused an offer, the principal actively recruited this individual, repeatedly explaining the critical nature of the position, until the offer was finally accepted.

The new principal also restructured the Campus Improvement Team (CIT), basically a site-based decision-making group. The initial charge to the CIT was to develop a school-wide discipline plan, a task which proved to be very contentious within the

committee. A draft set of discipline procedures was presented to the full faculty at a September staff meeting. After much discussion about the nature of the changes and the question of student rights, a dress code was approved and implemented. Implementation was difficult for several years, but, because enforcement was consistent among the faculty and administration, students and parents have gradually accepted the policy. As years pass and new classes of students enter the school, the discipline plan and dress code have been accepted as normal operating procedures.

The CIT has assumed responsibility for monitoring the performance of the campus on TAAS, reviewing dropout and attendance data, overseeing the instructional budget, and planning campus-based staff development. Authority to approve the instructional budget gives the CIT the ability to apply funds where they will support campus improvement goals. While the principal and the CIT do not always agree, the principal listens and maintains an openness to the committee's ideas. Based upon its prior successes, the CIT has achieved a level of confidence allowing it to consider many ideas and suggestions openly and try many of them to see "what works." The CIT members recognize the need to strive for greater ownership of and commitment to the new changes from more faculty, if they are to achieve the campus goals. While the school is bringing more opportunities to students, such as additional advanced placement classes, more clubs, and a greater variety of sports, future CIT plans include increasing advanced placement offerings and coordination with area colleges. Members acknowledged that the CIT may be in danger of "wearing too many hats" and may need to reconsider the scope of its work. Although subcommittees are formed as needed to investigate ideas, drawing membership from the CIT and the departments affected by a particular idea, the CIT realizes that it must draw more faculty into the working group.

Student Supports

A substantial student support system is in place at Chapa High School. The students are served by an experienced, stable core of counselors. To better meet the needs of students, two additional counselors, as well as a vocational counselor, have been added to the staff over the past four years. As a means of enhancing the students' sense of belonging to the school, the school stresses the importance of excurricular activities by sponsoring 28 clubs and 12 sports. At the spring music and art festival, every club on campus sets up a table to display its accomplishments and activities. In addition to current and incoming students, parents and community members are invited to attend. The National Hispanic Leadership Institute also has become active on campus, exposing students to experiences and educational opportunities through speakers before and after school and during the lunch period. Faculty attribute the reduced dropout rates among students with disabilities to the family-like atmosphere created on campus and the extensive communication between the faculty and students' families.

To target support specifically for at-risk ninth graders, the Transitional Adjustment Program (TAP) was instituted, based upon the staff's perceptions that this group lacked the social development needed to be successful in high school. This program is a product of many informal discussions among assistant principals who were concerned about the high failure, low attendance, and high discipline referral rates for ninth grade students. According to the assistant principals, this group of students needed better organizational skills, better impulse control, and more resistance to peer pressure. The staff also felt that focusing upon four academic subjects simultaneously was overwhelming for these at-risk students. The assistant principals presented their initial thoughts to the principal who encouraged them to develop a new transition program to better serve these students.

The TAP provides a highly supportive, self-contained environment for up to 100 students. The program includes a more extensive orientation to the school combined with instruction in such basic social skills as making friends and an extensive counseling component. At the request of one counselor, he is reassigned to serve the entire ninth grade rather than groups of students at different grades. This allows him to become thoroughly familiar with the ninth grade students during this critical year even though he has a

larger student count than other counselors. While he works in some manner with all ninth grade students, he meets in small groups every week with the ninth graders in the transition program. He also monitors their academic progress very closely.

The TAP adjusts both the daily schedule, as well as the sequencing of academic subjects, taken by the participating ninth graders. Students are divided into groups of up to 25 students. Block scheduling allows each group to concentrate on only two core subjects for nine weeks. They also take two electives simultaneously. For example, one student group studies algebra in the morning for two hours plus an elective; after lunch that group studies physical science and an elective. After nine weeks, that group of students has completed a half credit for both algebra and physical science. For the last nine weeks of the semester, that group switches to English and social studies but continues the two electives begun at the first of the semester.

Eight teachers, two each in English, mathematics, social studies, and science, volunteered for the program. They participated in staff development to enhance their skills to use multiple teaching strategies, grade holistically, and implement more collaborative learning. According to the faculty, students are more responsive to the "hands on" approach to science and mathematics where they are "solving problems themselves."

The ninth grade transition program has clearly articulated, measurable objectives: raising the attendance rate to 96.0 percent and reducing the failure rate to 10.0 percent. Early indicators of success indicate a 50.0 percent reduction in discipline referrals during the first grading period, as well as reduced failure rates compared to the other ninth grade classes taught by these same teachers. Other goals are not easily measured: more self awareness, better study and organizational skills, and better social development. The fact that the 80.0 percent of the TAP participants earned two half-credits toward graduation by mid-semester has been a powerful motivator for the at-risk students, according to the faculty. Teachers also reported changes in their own attitudes: better rapport with their students and higher levels of commitment to keeping their students in school and in the program. After a special education student was placed in the TAP program by error, the teachers involved asked that he be allowed to continue due to his high levels of success. As teachers identify problems with the new program, they initiated responses such as increased counseling with students and parents. According to the administrative staff, if the responses of these teachers could be duplicated outside the program and across the faculty, the campus would experience significant, positive change.

Chapa High School initiated a tutoring program located in a community center for students living in a low SES neighborhood. The highest proportion of dropouts at Chapa High School came from this area. At the community center, students receive academic help after school without having to cross gang territory. In order to expose the faculty to some of the challenges facing their students, the principal arranged for a bus and walking tour of the neighborhood and tutoring center. Faculty who had been reluctant and resistant to the tour readily acknowledged its value afterward. The highly visible commitment by the school to the students in this economically disadvantaged area has forged better relations with neighborhood parents. Academic assistance is provided not only to students from Chapa High School, but to students from feeder schools, as well as the local college. In addition, college students have volunteered to tutor. When the local district reduced funding to campuses and this tutoring center was threatened, one feeder school allocated some of its own limited funds to help support the tutoring center. Funds to support the tutoring center have also been received from two local businesses. The tutoring center was founded and is sustained by the dedication of the at-risk coordinator who continued to seek funds and made daily visits to the tutoring center throughout his tenure at Chapa. The at-risk coordinator who was the driving force behind the tutoring program was promoted to assistant principal at another high school with a large population of economically disadvantaged students in the district. Because of remodeling to the community center, the tutoring program was moved to the feeder elementary school where attendance continued to increase slowly.

New programs are always under consideration at Chapa High School. For example, a Saturday study

group has been instituted, in response to a request from students, to provide an informal peer tutoring opportunity for students who are not required to attend TAAS remediation. The principal agreed to provide refreshments for the study group. Although attendance has varied widely, the staff continue to support the project and experiment to find the best time and place for this program, allowing the program time to evolve.

Despite the efforts of teachers, counselors, parents, and administrators, students do decide to drop out of school. When this occurs, the at-risk coordinator makes extensive efforts to find an alternative placement for the student, someplace where the student can complete requirements for graduation or to pass the GED. In some cases, the at-risk coordinator arranges for students to transfer to another district's alternative program designed for adult learners needing a more flexible class schedule. In other cases, students enter the job corps, the district's high school designed for at-risk students, or one of several dropout recovery programs. The major focus of the at-risk coordinator at this point in the student's life is to reconnect the student to some avenue for academic success leading to greater opportunities in adult life. Although a new at-risk coordinator joined the staff in school year 1995-96, many successful practices developed by the previous at-risk coordinator have been continued.

Among the challenges still facing the campus is securing greater parental and community involvement. The high school holds monthly parent meetings addressing topics such as self esteem in adolescents, autism, and stress. Translation is always available for non-English speaking parents. The principal provides transportation for parents to attend evening parent meetings at the high school by sending buses to the neighborhood elementary schools. Periodically the principal sends letters to parents to inform them of upcoming events at the school. As a consequence of more frequent communications with parents, the attendance at parent meetings is slowly increasing. The community is taking renewed pride in the school, partially in response to the outreach efforts of the school. The high school is now perceived to be asking the community, "What are your needs? How can we help you?" The campus music and art festival, which is held each spring, has grown steadily and is now attended by hundreds of individuals, including people from the surrounding neighborhood. "The community feels that it is good to have the high school in the community," according to a parent. The foundation is in place for further community and parental involvement.

Faculty and Student Morale

As gang and student discipline problems were brought under control and as academic performance began to improve, administrators and faculty began to address more directly the students' lack of pride in the school. During his first year at the school, the principal ordered T-shirts in school colors for all faculty and staff. Everyone was encouraged to wear the shirts on Friday for color day. During that first year, few faculty and staff participated; however, after four years, everybody, including students, wears the school colors on Friday.

Pride in their students' accomplishments is visibly demonstrated by the administrators and teachers at the graduation ceremony. For that event, the principal provides academic regalia for all faculty who sit among graduating seniors. While this promotes a sense of ceremony for students and reinforces the importance of their accomplishments, it also honors the faculty for their academic credentials and recognizes them as academic role models. It is clear from their comments that students now feel they are connected to the school and valued by and cared for by teachers and administrators.

Just as students need and appreciate special considerations, faculty and staff at Chapa High School also benefit and actively support special events meant to promote positive professional and social relationships. A faculty committee provides a well-attended monthly faculty morale program which is usually held in the mornings before school. The faculty and staff also mark holidays with special food and topical programs. An Awards Assembly for Teachers was coordinated by department chairs to recognize teachers who had "gone the extra mile." Teachers were presented miniature "Oscars" and plaques to commemorate their accomplishments. At the end

of school, a faculty recognition banquet or "Brag Bash" was held, and each teacher was given 15 to 30 seconds to share with peers what people in their departments had accomplished that year. All ribbons, trophies, and other recognition for UIL academic and athletic competitions were also displayed.

Informal interactions with faculty indicate that they are proud to be at this school and "don't want to leave." A very supportive, inviting atmosphere based upon careful attention to basic needs of students, as well as the adults on campus, has been developed. Faculty talk excitedly about what they are going to do next year. On this campus, this excitement builds upon itself as success is added to success. Students and faculty state that they are at a good school, they want to "do better," and they want to "do more." According to both administrators and faculty members, faculty have progressed from "It's not going to work" to "What we do makes a difference. Let's try it and even if it doesn't work, we'll learn something." They give the extra time and effort and are rewarded with an atmosphere of enthusiasm. Teachers are confident that the administrators welcome their involvement with students and are not afraid to take risks. They are confident that they know something about what's going on with the school: they are informed and involved.

Chapa High School has demonstrated improvement in student performance which is unusual across the state. Faculty consistently acknowledged the impact of the principal on students. "Mr. X has done a super job of pushing for higher scores." At the same time, they credit students with accepting more responsibility for their own learning: "The students came to the realization of 'hey, it's for real'...Let's give credit where credit is due. The students did the hard work." In a similar vein, the principal recognized the contributions of the faculty: "The teachers know that without awesome teaching there are no awesome results. The teachers are the key." In essence, each group recognizes that student success at this high school is due to highly focused efforts from everyone on the campus.

Comparison of Data Categories across Sites

Data collection focused upon five very broad categories of information: mission and philosophy; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; professional growth and development; organization; and student, family and community. As data analysis progressed, an "other" category, created to contain data which fell outside the original areas, was used to code data related to safety and discipline, climate for change, resources, physical environment, incentives and rewards, leadership for change, and staff support.

When the percentage of data elements assigned to each category are compared, the different emphases associated within each campus are evident.

- Chapa High School provided the most balanced results across categories. Four categories each contributed approximately 20.0 percent of the data: Other (mainly because of safety and discipline and leadership issues); mission and philosophy; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and student, family and community (largely due to high incidence of student support data). These four categories provided approximately 80.0 percent of the information at Chapa.
- The primary emphases at Baldwin Middle School were equally split between curriculum, instruction, and assessment and student, family, and community (largely because of student supports). These categories combined accounted for 48.0 percent of the information gathered at Baldwin.
- Adams Elementary produced a clear, high level of emphasis upon curriculum, instruction, and assessment, with 35.0 percent of the data devoted to this topic. This represented the highest concentration of data for any category in any site.

When the results are compared across the sites, several interesting patterns emerge.

- Curriculum, instruction, and assessment received high levels of emphasis on each campus.

- A consistent pattern was seen for professional growth and development: that area represented the smallest percentage of information at each site.
- The issue of safety and discipline consistently received increasing emphasis as students moved up in grade level.

When the results are aggregated across the sites, the relative rankings of the categories, from highest emphasis to lowest, were:

curriculum, instruction, and assessment;
other (e.g., safety and discipline and leadership for change);
mission and philosophy / student, family, and community (tied);
organization; and
professional growth and development.

Themes

As the three case studies are considered together, several themes or generalizations capture the nature of their stories:

Each site has a clear focus on one or more goals.

Each site has a deep understanding of the need for change, as well as the drive to effect change.

Each understands the critical value of having the right people for the job.

Focus

Improving student performance is without question the ultimate goal which drives actions at each site. The impetus toward this performance focus comes in large measure from the state accountability system. Educators and parents now have access to information about student performance through this accountability system that must be understood and analyzed before appropriate responses are developed. The public nature of the system spotlights for the school and larger community the academic status of the campus, providing easy comparison to other campuses within the district and state. In essence the accountability system has provided the clear standard for measuring academic success. This has led to a refinement and concentration of educational activities toward improved test scores that is without historical precedent.

Although each site has as its ultimate goal improved student performance, each site is also uniquely characterized by a different intermediate focus reflected through the words of faculty, parents, the community, and students. At Adams Elementary the primary focus is unquestioningly academic, mastering a comprehensive body of knowledge and skills. At Baldwin Middle School, the characterization is more complex: maintaining high expectations for student learning in light of the changing nature of the student body. Chapa High School is characterized as evolving: once safety and discipline were reestablished, the focus became more clearly academic. Regardless of the nature of the characterization, those individuals involved with each school consistently described that common understanding around which activities were enacted and resources deployed. Identifying these common understandings and gaining commitments to address them emerged through concentrated study and problem-solving over a period of time. As a result, faculty and staff, as well as students and parents, at each site have come to an agreement on the nature of their concerns and problems.

Change process

At each site, the need to improve student performance produced a commitment to make fundamental changes in the way each campus conducted business. Achieving that commitment was not accomplished quickly, but occurred over a several-year developmental process at each site. Discussions eventually resulted in the independent acknowledgement at each site that the solutions to problems rested upon campus-based solutions. New leadership, whether newly assigned personnel or old personnel given new opportunities and expectations, emerged at each site. In addition, basic problem-solving techniques took on new life. Because of the wealth of data now provided by the state, monitoring student performance data occurred more frequently, and more decisions were driven by those data.

Leaders among principals and faculty have been willing to generate new ideas, give extra time and effort to implement new programs, and reallocate other scarce resources. The extended process of decision-making has allowed the staff at each site to shape innovations to better match the environment and has increased their ownership and commitment to the innovations (Weiss & Cambone, 1994). Because state accountability standards will continue to increase through the year 2000, the pressure on campuses for improvement will be constant. Commitment to long term change and problem-solving is critical.

All three sites have made a long term commitment to change; however, the results of their efforts have taken different forms. At one site, leadership has emerged which is highly supportive of risk-taking and willing to share responsibility for successes and failures. Innovation rests more on the willingness of faculty to act than on the need to secure permission to try something. The faculty and staff are well aware that the ball is now in their court. At the second site, the response to the demands for higher student performance has led to a more conservative approach to change, returning to a curriculum which exposes students daily to the kinds of general knowledge they may be lacking, as well as providing daily systematic instruction in the essential elements. At this site, the prominence of the state accountability system, as well as a local accountability system, is not without negative impact: these accountability systems have raised the stakes for innovations, reducing the time campus-based staff are willing to allow demonstration of effectiveness. At the third site, a dynamic tension exists between ideas emerging from the faculty and those coming from the administration. Individuals at this site are still negotiating their agreements with regard to needed changes, and, as a consequence, innovations to date have been less systematic than at the other two sites.

Staffing

In each site, experienced staff are valued for their depth of knowledge about both their subjects and their students. Their ideas about change are solicited rather than tolerated. Their experience serves as a sounding board for new ideas and provides a foundation for risk-taking. Leadership qualities among faculty have taken on new importance as roles have changed. The delegation of decision-making authority among parents, community members, and faculty has drawn more individuals into the arena of shared responsibility for student success. Recruiting faculty and other staff demands that campuses attend to a new, broader array of skill and knowledge qualifications than in the past. When faculty or other staff prove unable or unwilling to meet the new challenges, these administrators have acted to find those who can and will.

The commitment of faculty, administrators, and other school personnel to students has expanded school beyond its usual allotment of time during the day, as well as to settings beyond the campus. In truth, the extensive commitment of extra time and effort by volunteers among the faculty and administrators is, in many cases, the engine which both drives school improvement activities and provides their Achilles' heel. When personnel change, these "above and beyond" efforts may not be sustainable. At one site, one significant personnel change has already occurred and whether the programs extensively supported by that individual's voluntary efforts will continue to thrive is a critical issue.

Conclusions

Although case studies are limited in their generalizability due to the small numbers usually involved, they can offer ideas for discussion and consideration, especially within settings with highly similar characteristics.

What can be learned from this set of case studies?

- The new Texas accountability system contains both academic and social indicators: TAAS performance, dropout rates, and attendance rates. These case study sites did not focus on one domain to the exclusion of the other. Students often drop out of school and fail to attend for non-academic reasons. In all three sites, academic support was matched by large amounts of non-academic support for students.

- Each site displayed a heightened sense of interdependence within the system. Teachers depend upon parents to serve as first teachers and to continue to support their children's schooling throughout their careers. Teachers in later grades depend upon those in the early ones to teach the academic foundations, as well as the organizational and self responsibility skills, needed to succeed. Instead of complaining about problems, teachers in the later grades have reached into the lower grades to communicate what they expect and to offer assistance in more systematic ways.

- Staff across the board devote extraordinary time and effort to their students. Teachers function as professionals, using their skills, knowledge, and experience to develop new responses to ever changing and challenging situations.

In a broader sense, these case studies provide numerous illustrations of the conditions which, according to Rossi and Stringfield (1995), must be met if innovative programs are to promote lasting improvements. The key elements which exemplify a sense of community within schools are:

- shared vision
- shared sense of purpose
- shared values
- incorporation of diversity
- communication
- participation
- caring
- trust
- teamwork, and
- respect and recognition.

Rossi and Stringfield also identified key similarities between effective programs and what are termed "high reliability organizations," where the criterion of success is 100.0 percent error-free operation. Those similarities include:

1. Clear central goals that are widely shared.
2. A shared belief among staff that success is critical and that failure would be disastrous.
3. Intensive recruitment and ongoing training are stressed.
4. Staff members develop an interdependence.
5. Formal, logical decision analysis evolves into standard operating procedure.
6. Vigilance against lapses and flexibility toward rules are prized.
7. Long term results are prized over short term efficiencies by the supervising organization.

That these similarities and characteristics are associated, in various degrees, with the three case study sites is clear.

Change at these sites had been led by inquirers and learners, those who enable teamwork and shared purpose. Because of the complex nature of change in schools, these leaders know how to use both planned and unplanned changes to further their goals. They recognize that without teachers' involvement meaningful change in schools does not occur (Fullan, 1993). Within these case study sites, governance has been altered to give teachers, parents, and campus administrators real authority to make major changes in established practices (Guskey & Peterson, 1996).

Implications

The usefulness of case studies such as these lies not in their generalizability, but in the very fact of the existence of campuses where large populations of minority and economically disadvantaged students perform well. Too often test results for members of minority populations are disappointing, and the demographic composition of the campus is used as an excuse for those poor results and as justification for failure to improve over long periods of time. The fact that these three schools have produced dramatic improvements in some cases, as well as steady growth in others, serves as counter examples to those statements. Their success has not been a one-year wonder: each campus maintained improving test scores with the spring 1995. Campuses like these three serve as examples for other campuses with similar populations as they undertake their own school improvement efforts.

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COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

TITLE VI, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964; THE MODIFIED COURT ORDER, CIVIL ACTION 5281, FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT, EASTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS, TYLER DIVISION

Reviews of local education agencies pertaining to compliance with Title VI Civil Rights Act of 1964 and with specific requirements of the Modified Court Order, Civil Action No. 5281, Federal District Court, Eastern District of Texas, Tyler Division are conducted periodically by staff representatives of the Texas Education Agency. These reviews cover at least the following policies and practices:

(1) acceptance policies on student transfers from other school districts;

(2) operation of school bus routes or runs on a nonsegregated basis;

(3) nondiscrimination in extracurricular activities and the use of school facilities;

(4) nondiscriminatory practices in the hiring, assigning, promoting, paying, demoting, reassigning, or dismissing of faculty and staff members who work with children;

(5) enrollment and assignment of students without discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin;

(6) nondiscriminatory practices relating to the use of a student's first language; and

(7) evidence of published procedures for hearing complaints and grievances.

In addition to conducting reviews, the Texas Education Agency staff representatives check complaints of discrimination made by a citizen or citizens residing in a school district where it is alleged discriminatory practices have occurred or are occurring.

Where a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act is found, the findings are reported to the Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education.

If there is a direct violation of the Court Order in Civil Action No. 5281 that cannot be cleared through negotiation, the sanctions required by the Court Order are applied.

TITLE VII, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964 AS AMENDED BY THE EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY ACT OF 1972; EXECUTIVE ORDERS 11246 AND 11375; EQUAL PAY ACT OF 1964; TITLE IX, EDUCATION AMENDMENTS; REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 AS AMENDED; 1974 AMENDMENTS TO THE WAGE-HOUR LAW EXPANDING THE AGE DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT ACT OF 1967; VIETNAM ERA VETERANS READJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE ACT OF 1972 AS AMENDED; IMMIGRATION REFORM AND CONTROL ACT OF 1986; AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990; AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1991.

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Austin, Texas 78701-1494

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